

EYE-WITNESS'S NARRATIVE OF
THE WAR

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FROM THE MARNE TO NEUVE
CHAPELLE

SEPTEMBER, 1914—MARCH, 1915

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NOTE

THIS volume includes a series of descriptive accounts, each of them compiled by an "Eye-Witness present with General Headquarters," of the movements and operations of the British Army and of the French Armies in immediate touch with it during the period from September, 1914, to the end of March, 1915.

The narratives are printed as communicated by the Press Bureau. It is believed that passages of considerable interest have occasionally been omitted in the newspaper reproductions, and that they are now issued in a complete and collected form for the first time.

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EYE-WITNESS'S NARRATIVE OF THE WAR

I

FROM THE MARNE TO THE AISNE

(September 6—September 10, 1914.)

September 11, 1914.

It will be remembered that the general position of our troops on Sunday, September 6, was stated to be south of the Marne, with French forces in line on our right and left. Practically there had been no change in the situation since Thursday, the 3rd, which marked the end of our Army's long retirement from the Belgian frontier through Northern France.

On Friday, the 4th, it became apparent that there was an alteration in the direction of advance of almost the whole of the 1st German Army. That Army since the battle near Mons on August 23 had been playing its part in the colossal strategic endeavour to create a Sedan for the Allies by outflanking and enveloping the left of their whole line so as to encircle and drive both British and French to the south. There was now a change in its objective; and it was observed that the German forces opposite the British were beginning to move in a south-easterly direction instead of continuing south-west on to the Capital.

Leaving a strong rearguard along the line of the River Ourcq (which flows south and joins the Marne at Lizy-sur-Ourcq) to keep off the French 6th Army, which by then had been formed and was to the north-west of

Paris, they were evidently executing what amounted to a flank march diagonally across our front. Prepared to ignore the British, as being driven out of the fight, they were initiating an effort to attack the left flank of the French main army which stretched in a long curved line from our right towards the east, and so to carry out against it alone the envelopment which had so far failed against the combined forces of the Allies.

On Saturday, the 5th, this movement on the part of the Germans was continued, and large advanced parties crossed the Marne southwards at Trilport, Sammeroy, La Ferté-sous-Jouarre and Château-Thierry. There was considerable fighting with the French 5th Army on the French left, which fell back from its position south of the Marne towards the Seine. On Sunday large hostile forces crossed the Marne, and pushed on through Coulommiers past the British right. Further east they were attacked at night by the French 5th Army, which captured three villages at the point of the bayonet.

On Monday, the 7th, there was a general advance on the part of the Allies in this quarter of the field. Our forces, which had by now been reinforced, pushed on in a north-easterly direction, in co-operation with an advance of the French 5th Army to the north and of the French 6th Army eastwards, against the German rearguard along the Ourcq.

Possibly weakened by the detachment of troops to the eastern theatre of operations, and realizing that the action of the French 6th Army against the line of the Ourcq and the advance of the British placed their own flanking movement in considerable danger of being taken in rear and on its right flank, the Germans on this day commenced to retire towards the north-east. This was the first time that these troops had turned back since their attack at Mons a fortnight before, and, from reports received, the order to retreat when so close to Paris was a bitter disappointment. From letters found on the dead there is no doubt that there was a general impression amongst the enemy's troops that they were about to enter Paris.

On Tuesday, the 8th, the German movement north-eastwards was continued, their rearguards on the south of the Marne being pressed back to that river by our troops and by the French on our right, the latter capturing three villages after a hand-to-hand fight and the infliction of severe loss on the enemy.

The fighting along the Ourcq continued on this day and was of the most sanguinary character, for the Germans had massed a great force of artillery along this line. Very few of their infantry were seen by the French. The French 5th Army also made a fierce attack on the Germans in Montmirail, regaining that place.

On Wednesday, the 9th, the battle between the French 6th Army and what was now the German flank guard along the Ourcq continued. The British Corps, overcoming some resistance on the River Petit Morin, crossed the Marne in pursuit of the Germans, who were now hastily retreating northwards. One of our corps was delayed by an obstinate defence made by a strong rearguard with machine guns at La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, where the bridge had been destroyed.

On Thursday, the 10th, the French 6th Army continued its pressure on the west while the 5th Army, by forced marches, reached the line Château-Thierry—Dormans on the Marne. Our troops also continued the pursuit on the north of the latter river and after a considerable amount of fighting captured some 1,500 prisoners, four guns, six machine guns, and 50 transport wagons. Many of the enemy were killed and wounded, and the numerous thick woods which dot the country north of the Marne are filled with German stragglers. Most of them appear to have been without food for at least two days. Indeed, in this area of operations the Germans seem to be demoralized and inclined to surrender in small parties, and the general situation appears to be most favourable to the Allies.

Much brutal and senseless damage has been done in the villages occupied by the enemy. Property has been wantonly destroyed, pictures in the châteaux have been ripped up, and the houses generally pillaged. It is stated

on unimpeachable authority, also, that the inhabitants have been much ill-treated.

Interesting incidents have occurred during the fighting. On the 10th part of our 2nd Army Corps advancing north found itself marching parallel with another infantry force at some little distance away. At first it was thought that this was another British unit. After some time, however, it was discovered that it was a body of Germans retreating. Measures were promptly taken to head off the enemy, who were surrounded and trapped in a sunken road, where over 400 men surrendered.

On the 10th a small party of French under a non-commissioned officer was cut off and surrounded. After a desperate resistance it was decided to go on fighting to the end. Finally the n.c.o. and one man only were left, both being wounded. The Germans came up and shouted to them to lay down their arms. The German commander, however, signed to them to keep their arms, and then asked for permission to shake hands with the wounded non-commissioned officer, who was carried off on his stretcher with his rifle by his side.

The arrival of the reinforcements and the continued advance have delighted the troops, who are full of zeal and anxious to press on.

Quite one of the features of the campaign, on our side, has been the success attained by the Royal Flying Corps. In regard to the collection of information it is impossible either to award too much praise to our aviators for the way they have carried out their duties or to over-estimate the value of the intelligence collected, more especially during the recent advance. In due course, certain examples of what has been effected may be specified and the far-reaching nature of the results fully explained, but that time has not yet arrived. That the services of our Flying Corps, which has really been on trial, are fully appreciated by our Allies is shown by the following message from the Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies received on the night of September 9 by Field-Marshal Sir John French:—

“ Please express most particularly to Marshal French my thanks for services rendered on every day by the English Flying Corps. The precision, exactitude, and regularity of the news brought in by its members are evidence of their perfect organization and also of the perfect training of pilots and observers.”

To give a rough idea of the amount of work carried out it is sufficient to mention that, during a period of 20 days up to September 10, a daily average of more than nine reconnaissance flights of over 100 miles each has been maintained.

The constant object of our aviators has been to effect the accurate location of the enemy's forces, and, incidentally—since the operations cover so large an area—of our own units. Nevertheless, the tactics adopted for dealing with hostile aircraft are to attack them instantly with one or more British machines. This has been so far successful that in five cases German pilots or observers have been shot in the air and their machines brought to the ground. As a consequence, the British Flying Corps has succeeded in establishing an individual ascendancy which is as serviceable to us as it is damaging to the enemy. How far it is due to this cause it is not possible at present to ascertain definitely, but the fact remains that the enemy have recently become much less enterprising in their flights. Something in the direction of the mastery of the air has already been gained.

In pursuance of the principle that the main object of military aviators is the collection of information, bomb-dropping has not been indulged in to any great extent. On one occasion a petrol bomb was successfully exploded in a German bivouac at night, while, from a diary found on a dead German cavalry soldier, it has been discovered that a high explosive bomb thrown at a cavalry column from one of our aeroplanes struck an ammunition wagon. The resulting explosion killed 15 of the enemy.

II

THE BATTLE OF THE AISNE

September 14, 1914.

Since Thursday, September 10, the Army has made steady progress in its endeavour to drive back the enemy in co-operation with the French. The country across which it has had to force its way, and will have to continue to do so, is undulating and covered with patches of thick wood. Within the area which faced the British before the advance commenced, right up to Laon, the chief feature of tactical importance is the fact that there are six rivers running right across the direction of advance, at all of which it was possible that the Germans might make resistance.

These are, in order from the south, the Marne, the Ourcq, the Vesle, the Aisne, the Ailette, and the Oise. The enemy held the line of the Marne, which was crossed by our forces on September 9 as a purely rearguard operation; our passage of the Ourcq, which here runs almost due east and west, was not contested; the Vesle was only lightly held; while the resistance along the Aisne, both against French and British, has been and still is of a determined character.

The course of the operations during 11th, 12th, and 13th has been as follows:—On Friday, the 11th, but little opposition was met with by us along any part of our front, and the direction of advance was, for the purpose of co-operating with our Allies, turned slightly to the north-east. The day was spent in pushing forward and in gathering in various hostile detachments, and by nightfall our forces had reached a line to the north of the Ourcq extending from Oulchy-le-Château to Long Pont. On this day there was also a general advance on the part of

the French along their whole line, which ended in substantial success, in one portion of the field Duke Albrecht of Wurtemberg's Fourth Army being driven back across the Saulx, and elsewhere the whole of the corps artillery of a German corps being captured. Several German colours also were taken.

It was only on this day that the full extent of the victory gained by the Allies on the 8th was appreciated, by them, and the moral effect of this success has been enormous. An order dated September 6 or 7, by the Commander of the German VIIth Corps, was picked up, in which it was stated that the great object of the war was about to be attained, since the French were going to accept battle, and that upon the result of this battle would depend the issue of the war and the honour of the German armies.

It seems probable that the Germans not only expected to find that the British Army was beyond the power of assuming the offensive for some time, but counted on the French having been driven back on to the line of the Seine; and that, though surprised to find the latter moving forward against them after they had crossed the Marne, they were in no wise deterred from making a great effort.

On Saturday, the 12th, the enemy were found to be occupying a very formidable position opposite to us on the north of the Aisne. At Soissons they held both sides of the river and an entrenched line on the hills to the north. Of eight road bridges and two railway bridges crossing the Aisne within our section of front, seven of the former and both of the latter had been demolished. Working from west to east our Third Army Corps gained some high ground south of the Aisne overlooking the Aisne valley east of Soissons. Here a long range artillery duel between our guns and those of the French on our left and the enemy's artillery on the hills continued during the greater part of the day, and did not cease until nearly midnight. The enemy had a very large number of heavy howitzers in well-concealed positions. The movement of this Army Corps was effected in co-operation with that of the French

6th Army on our left, which gained the southern half of the town during the night. The Second Army Corps did not cross the Aisne.

The First Army Corps got over the River Vesle to the south of the Aisne after the crossing had been secured by the 1st Cavalry Division. It then reached a line south of the Aisne practically without fighting. At Braine the 1st Cavalry Division met with considerable opposition from infantry and machine guns holding the town and guarding the bridge. With the aid of some of our infantry it gained possession of the town about midday, driving the enemy to the north. Some hundred prisoners were captured round Braine, where the Germans had thrown a large amount of field gun ammunition into the river, where it was visible under 2 ft. of water. On our right the French reached the line of the river Vesle.

On this day began the action along the Aisne which is not yet finished, and which may be merely of a rearguard nature on a large scale, or may be the commencement of a battle of a more serious nature. It rained heavily on Saturday afternoon and all through the night, which severely handicapped the transport.

On Sunday, the 13th, an extremely strong resistance was encountered along the whole of our front, which was some 15 miles in length. The action still consisted for the most part of long-range gun fire, that of the Germans being to a great extent from their heavy howitzers, which were firing from cleverly concealed positions. Some of the actual crossings of the Aisne were guarded by strong detachments of infantry with machine guns. By nightfall portions of all three corps were across the river, the cavalry returning to the south side. By this night or early next morning three pontoon bridges had been built, and our troops also managed to get across the river by means of a bridge carrying the canal over the river, which had not been destroyed. On our left the French pressed on, but were prevented by artillery fire from building a pontoon bridge at Soissons. A large number of infantry, however, crossed in single file on the top of one girder of the railway bridge which was left standing.

During the last three or four days many isolated parties of Germans have been discovered hiding in the numerous woods a long way behind our line. As a rule they seem glad to surrender, and the condition of some of them may be gathered from the following incident. An officer, who was proceeding along the road in charge of a number of led horses, received information that there were some of the enemy in the neighbourhood. Upon seeing them he gave the order to charge, whereupon three German officers and 106 men surrendered.

The following are some details of the conduct of the enemy in occupation of three of the small towns to the north of Paris:—

At Senlis it is stated, on what appears to be good authority, that a poacher shot one German soldier and wounded another as the forces entered the town. The German commander then assembled the Mayor of the town and five other leading citizens and forced them to kneel before graves which had already been dug. Requisition was made for various supplies, and the six citizens were then taken to a neighbouring field and shot. According to the corroborative evidence of several independent persons, some 24 people, including women and children, were also shot. The town was then pillaged, and was fired in several places before it was evacuated. It is believed that the cathedral was not damaged, but many houses were destroyed. Creil was also thoroughly pillaged and many houses were burnt.

At Crepy on September 3 various articles were requisitioned under threat of a fine of 100,000*fr.* for every day's delay in the delivery of the goods. The following list shows the amounts and natures of the supplies demanded, and also the actual quantities furnished:—

<i>Requisitioned.</i>	<i>Furnished.</i>
Flour, 20,000 kilos	20,000 kilos.
Dried vegetables, 5,000 kilos ..	800 ..
Coffee, 1,000 kilos	809 ..
Salt, 1,000 kilos	2,000 ..
Oats, 100,000 kilos	55,000 ..
Red wine, 2,500 litres	2,500 litres. 0

Requisitioned.

All smoked meats, ham, cloth, new boots, tobacco, biscuits, handkerchiefs, shirts, braces, stockings, horseshoes, bicycles, motor-cars, petrol.

Furnished.

61 pairs of boots.
91 bicycles.
15 motor tyres.
6 inner tubes.

Immediately on arrival a proclamation was issued by the commander of the German division. The main points were:—That all arms were to be handed in at the Town Hall at once. That all civilians found with arms would be shot at once. That no person was to be in the street after dark. That no lights were to be maintained in the houses or streets at night. That the doors of all houses were to be left open. That the inhabitants were not to collect in groups. That any obstruction of the German troops or threatening of them would be immediately punished by death. That German money was to be accepted at the rate of 1 mark for 1f. 25.

At Villers Gotterets the Mayor appears to have behaved very judiciously, and, though supplies far in excess of the capabilities of the place were demanded, the town was not seriously damaged. The Germans evacuated the place on September 11 in such haste that they left behind a large amount of the bread requisitioned. It was stated by the inhabitants that the enemy destroyed and abandoned 15 motor-lorries, seven guns, and ammunition wagons.

Reims was occupied by the enemy on September 3. It was re-occupied by the French after considerable fighting on the 13th. On the 12th a proclamation, a copy of which is in possession of the British Army, was posted all over the town. A literal translation of this poster is given below:

•

PROCLAMATION.

In the event of an action being fought either to-day or in the immediate future in the neighbourhood of Reims, or in the town itself, the inhabitants are warned that they must remain absolutely calm and must in no way try to take part in the fighting. They must not attempt to attack either

isolated soldiers or detachments of the German Army. The erection of barricades, the taking up of paving stones in the streets in a way to hinder the movements of troops, or, in a word, any action that may embarrass the German Army, is formally forbidden.

With a view to securing adequately the safety of the troops and to instil calm into the population of Reims the persons named below have been seized as hostages by the Commander-in-Chief of the German Army. These hostages will be hanged at the slightest attempt at disorder. Also the town will be totally or partly burnt and the inhabitants will be hanged for any infraction of the above.

By order of the German authorities,
THE MAYOR, Dr. Langlet.

REIMS, *September 12, 1914.*

Here follow the names of 81 of the principal inhabitants of Reims, with their addresses, including four priests, ending with the words "and some others."

GENERAL HEADQUARTERS,
September 18, 1914.

At the date of the last narrative—on September 14—the Germans were making a determined resistance along the River Aisne. The opposition, which it was at first thought might possibly be of a rearguard nature not entailing material delay to our progress, has developed, and has proved to be more serious than was anticipated. The action now being fought by the Germans along their line may, it is true, have been undertaken in order to gain time for some strategic operation or move, and may not be their main stand.

But if this be so, the fighting is naturally on a scale which, as to extent of ground covered and duration of resistance, makes it indistinguishable in its progress from what is known as a "pitched battle," though the enemy certainly showed signs of considerable disorganization during the earlier days of their retirement. Whether it was originally intended by them to defend the position they took up as strenuously as they have done, or whether the delay gained for them during the 12th and 13th, by

their artillery has enabled them to develop their resistance and to reinforce their line to an extent not originally contemplated, cannot yet be said.

So far as we are concerned, the action still being contested is the battle of the Aisne, for we are fighting just across that river along the whole of our front. To the east and west the struggle is not confined to the valley of that river, though it will probably bear its name. The progress of our operations and of those French Armies nearest to us for the 14th, 15th, 16th, and 17th will now be described.

On Monday, the 14th, those of our troops which had on the previous day crossed the Aisne after driving in the German rearguard on that evening found portions of the enemy's forces in prepared defensive positions on the plateau on the right bank, and could do little more than secure a footing north of the river. This, however, they maintained in spite of two counter-attacks, delivered at dusk and at 10 p.m., in which the fighting was severe.

During the 14th strong reinforcements of our troops were passed to the north bank, the troops crossing by ferry, by pontoon bridges, and by the remains of the permanent bridges. Close co-operation with the French forces was maintained, and the general progress made was good. Although the opposition was vigorous and the state of the roads after the heavy rain made movements slow, one division alone failed to secure the ground it expected to. The 1st Army Corps, after repulsing repeated attacks, captured 600 prisoners and 12 guns; the cavalry also took a number of prisoners. Many of the Germans taken belong to Reserve and Landwehr formations, which fact appears to indicate that the enemy is compelled to draw on the older classes of soldiers to fill the gaps in his ranks. •

There was heavy rain throughout the night of the 14th-15th, and during September 15 the situation of the British forces underwent no essential change, but it became more and more evident that the defensive preparations made by the enemy were more extensive than was at first apparent. In order to counterbalance these

measures were taken by us to economize troops and to secure protection from the hostile artillery fire, which was very fierce, and our men continued to improve their own entrenchments.

The Germans bombarded our lines nearly all day, using heavy guns, brought no doubt from before Maubeuge, as well as those with the corps. All their counter-attacks, however, failed, although in some places they were repeated six times; one made on the 4th Guards Brigade was repulsed with heavy slaughter. An attempt to advance slightly made by part of our line was unsuccessful as regards gain in ground, but led to withdrawal of part of the enemy's infantry and artillery. Further counter-attacks made during the night were beaten off. Rain came on towards evening and continued intermittently until 9 a.m. on the 16th. Besides adding to the discomfort of the soldiers holding open trenches in the firing line, the wet weather to some extent hampered the motor transport service, which was also hindered by the broken bridges.

On Wednesday, the 16th, there was little change in the situation opposite the British. The efforts made by the enemy were less active than on the previous day, though their bombardment continued throughout the morning and evening. Our artillery fire drove the defenders off one of the salients of their position, but they returned in the evening. Forty prisoners were taken by the 3rd Division.

On Thursday, the 17th, the situation still remained unchanged in its essentials. The German heavy artillery fire was more active than on the previous day. The only infantry attacks made by the enemy were on the extreme right of our position, and, as had happened before, were repulsed with heavy loss, chiefly on this occasion by our field artillery.

In order to convey some idea of the nature of the fighting it may be said that along the greater part of our front the Germans have been driven back from the forward slopes on the north of the river. Their infantry are holding strong lines of trenches amongst and along

the edges of the numerous woods which crown these slopes. These trenches are elaborately constructed and cleverly concealed. In many places there are wire entanglements and lengths of rabbit fencing both in the woods and in the open, carefully aligned so that they can be swept by rifle fire and machine guns, which are invisible from our side of the valley. The ground in front of the infantry trenches is also as a rule under cross-fire from field artillery placed on neighbouring features and under high-angle fire from pieces placed well back behind woods on top of the plateau.

A feature of this action, as of the previous fights, is the use made by the enemy of their numerous heavy howitzers, with which they are able to direct a long-range fire all over the valley and right across it. Upon these they evidently place great reliance. Where our men are holding the forward edges of the high ground on the north side they are now strongly entrenched. They are well fed, and in spite of the wet weather of the past week are cheerful and confident. The bombardment by both sides has been very heavy, and on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday was practically continuous.

Nevertheless, in spite of the general din caused by the reports of the immense number of heavy guns in action along our front on Wednesday, the arrival of a French force acting against the German right flank was at once announced on the east of our front some miles away by the continuous roar of their quick-firing artillery with which their attack was opened. So far as the British are concerned the greater part of this week has been passed in bombardment, in gaining ground by degrees, and in beating back severe counter-attacks with heavy slaughter. Our casualties have been severe, but it is probable that those of the enemy are heavier. The rain has caused a great drop in temperature and there is more than a distinct feeling of autumn in the air, especially in the early mornings.

On our right and left the French have been fighting fiercely and have also been gradually gaining ground. One village has already during this battle been captured

and recaptured twice by each side, and at the time of writing remains in the hands of the Germans. The fighting has been at close quarters and of the most desperate nature, and the streets of the village are filled with the dead of both sides. As an example of the spirit which is inspiring our Allies the following translation of the *Ordre du Jour* published on September 9 after the battle of Montmirail by the Commander of the French 5th Army is given:—

“Soldiers !

“Upon the memorable fields of Montmirail, of Vau-champs, or Champaubert, which a century ago witnessed the victories of our ancestors over Blücher’s Prussians, your vigorous offensive has triumphed over the resistance of the Germans. Held on his flanks, his centre broken, the enemy is now retreating towards East and North by forced marches. The most renowned army corps of Old Prussia, the contingents of Westphalia, of Hanover, or Brandenburg, retired in haste before you.

“This first success is no more than a prelude. The enemy is shaken, but not yet decisively beaten.

“You have still to undergo severe hardships, to make long marches, to fight hard battles.

“May the image of our country, soiled by barbarians, always remain before your eyes. Never was it more necessary to sacrifice all for her.

“Saluting the heroes who have fallen in the fighting of the last few days, my thoughts turn towards you—the victors in the next battle.

“Forward, soldiers, for France !

Montmirail, 9th September, 1914.

General Commanding the Vth Army,

FRANCHET D’ESPÈREY.”

The Germans are a formidable enemy. Well trained, long prepared, and brave, their soldiers are carrying on the contest with skill and valour. Nevertheless they are fighting to win anyhow, regardless of all the rules of fair play, and there is evidence that they do not hesitate at anything in order to gain victory. A large number of

the tales of their misbehaviour are exaggerations, and some of the stringent precautions they have taken to guard themselves against the inhabitants of the areas traversed are possibly justifiable measures of war. But at the same time it has been definitely established that they have committed atrocities on many occasions and they have been guilty of brutal conduct.

So many letters and statements of our own wounded soldiers have been published in our newspapers that the following epistle from a German soldier of the 74th Infantry Regiment (Xth Corps) to his wife may also be of interest:—

MY DEAR WIFE,

I have just been living through days that defy imagination. I should never have thought that men could stand it. Not a second has passed but my life has been in danger, and yet not a hair of my head has been hurt. It was horrible, it was ghastly. But I have been saved for you and for our happiness and I take heart again, although I am still terribly unnerved. God grant that I may see you again soon and that this horror may soon be over. None of us can do any more, human strength is at an end.

I will try to tell you about it:—

On the 5th September the enemy were reported to be taking up a position near St. Prix (N.E. of Paris). The Xth Corps, which had made an astonishingly rapid advance, of course, attacked on the Sunday.

Steep slopes led up to heights which were held in considerable force. With our weak detachments of the 74th and 91st Regiments we reached the crest and came under a terrible artillery fire that mowed us down. However, we entered St. Prix. Hardly had we done so than we were met with shell fire and a violent fusillade from the enemy's infantry. Our Colonel was badly wounded—he is the third we have had. Fourteen men were killed round me. . . . We got away in a lull without being hit.

* * * * *

The 7th, 8th, and 9th of September we were constantly under shell and shrapnel fire and suffered terrible losses. I was in a house which was hit several times. The fear of a death of agony which is in every man's heart, and naturally so, is a terrible feeling.

How often I thought of you, my darling, and what I suffered in that terrifying battle which extended along a front of many miles near Montmirail, you cannot possibly imagine. Our heavy artillery was being used for the siege of Maubeuge; we wanted it badly, as the enemy had theirs in force and kept up a furious bombardment. For four days I was under artillery fire. It is like Hell, but a thousand times worse. On the night of the 9th the order was given to retreat, as it would have been madness to attempt to hold our position with our few men, and we should have risked a terrible defeat the next day. The First and Third Armies had not been able to attack with us, as we had advanced too rapidly.

Our *moral* was absolutely broken.

In spite of unheard-of sacrifices we had achieved nothing. I cannot understand how our Army, after fighting three great battles and being terribly weakened, was sent against a position which the enemy had prepared for three weeks, but naturally I know nothing of the intentions of our Chiefs. . . . They say nothing has been lost. In a word, we retired towards Cormontreuil and Reims by forced marches by day and night. We hear that three armies are going to get into line, entrench, rest, and then start afresh our victorious march on Paris. It was not a defeat, but only a strategic retreat. I have confidence in our Chiefs that everything will be successful. Our first battalion, which has fought with unparalleled bravery, is reduced from 1,200 to 194 men. These numbers speak for themselves. . . .

Amongst minor happenings of interest is the following:—

During a counter-attack by the German 53rd Regiment on portions of the Northampton and Queen's Regiments on Thursday, the 17th, a force of some 400 of the enemy were allowed to approach right up to the trench occupied by a platoon of the former regiment, owing to the fact that they had held up their hands and made gestures that were interpreted as signs that they wished to surrender. When they were actually on the parapet of the trench held by the Northampton's they opened fire on our men at point-blank range.

Unluckily for the enemy, however, flanking them and only some 400 yards away there happened to be a

machine-gun manned by a detachment of the "Queen's." This at once opened fire, cutting a lane through their mass, and they fell back to their own trench with great loss. Shortly afterwards they were driven further back with additional loss by a battalion of the Guards which came up in support.

An incident which occurred some little time ago during our retirement is also worthy of record. On August 28, during the battle fought by the French along the Oise, between La Fère and Guise, one of the French Commanders desired to make an air reconnaissance. It was found, however, that no observers were available. Wishing to help our Allies as much as possible, the British officer attached to this particular French Army volunteered to go up with a pilot to observe. He had never been in an aeroplane, but he made the ascent and produced a valuable reconnaissance report. Incidentally he had a duel in the air at an altitude of 6,000 feet with the observer of a German Taube monoplane which approached. He fired several shots and drove off the hostile aeroplane. His action was much appreciated by the French.

In view of the many statements being made in the Press as to the use of Zeppelins against us, it is interesting to note that the Royal Flying Corps, who have been out on reconnaissances on every day since their arrival in France, have never seen a Zeppelin, though airships of a non-rigid type have been seen on two occasions. Near the Marne, late one evening, two such were observed over the German forces. Aeroplanes were dispatched against them, but in the darkness our pilots were uncertain of the airships' nationality and did not attack. It was afterwards made clear that they could not have been French. A week later, an officer reconnoitring to the flank saw an airship over the German forces and opposite the French. It had no distinguishing mark and was assumed to belong to the latter, though it is now known, that it also must have been a German craft. The orders of the Royal Flying Corps are to attack Zeppelins at once, and there is some disappointment at the absence of those targets.

The following special order has been issued to-day to the troops:—

SPECIAL ORDER OF THE DAY.

BY FIELD-MARSHAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, G.C.B.,
G.C.V.O., K.C.M.G., COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, BRITISH
ARMY IN THE FIELD.

17th September, 1914

Once more I have to express my deep appreciation of the splendid behaviour of Officers, Non-commissioned Officers, and Men of the Army under my Command throughout the great Battle of the Aisne, which has been in progress since the evening of the 12th instant. The Battle of the Marne, which lasted from the morning of the 6th to the evening of the 10th, had hardly ended in the precipitate flight of the enemy when we were brought face to face with a position of extraordinary strength, carefully entrenched and prepared for defence by an Army and a Staff which are thorough adepts in such work.

Throughout the 13th and 14th that position was most gallantly attacked by the British Forces, and the passage of the Aisne effected. This is the third day the troops have been gallantly holding the position they have gained against the most desperate counter-attacks and a hail of heavy artillery.

I am unable to find adequate words in which to express the admiration I feel for their magnificent conduct.

The French Armies on our right and left are making good progress, and I feel sure that we have only to hold on with tenacity to the ground we have won for a very short time longer, when the Allies will be again in full pursuit of a beaten enemy.

The self-sacrificing devotion and splendid spirit of the British Army in France will carry all before it.

(Sd.) J. D. P. FRENCH, *Field-Marshal*,

Commanding-in-Chief, The British Army
in the Field.

September 21 (?) , 1914.

The enemy is still maintaining himself along the whole front; and in order to do so is throwing into the fight detachments composed of units from very different formations—the Active Army, the Reserve, and the Landwehr—as is shown by the uniforms of the prisoners recently captured. Our progress, although slow, on account of the strength of the defensive positions against which we are pressing, has in certain directions been continuous. But the present battle may well last for some days more before a decision is reached, since, in truth, it now approximates somewhat to siege warfare. The Germans are making use of searchlights, and this fact, coupled with their great strength in heavy artillery, leads to the supposition that they are employing material which may have been collected for the siege of Paris.

The nature of the general situation after the operations of the 18th, the 19th, and the 20th cannot better be summarized than as expressed recently by a neighbouring French Commander to his Corps:—

“ Having repulsed repeated and violent counter-attacks made by the enemy . . . we have the feeling that we have been victorious.”

So far as the British are concerned, the course of events during these three days can be described in a few words. During Friday, the 18th, artillery fire was kept up intermittently by both sides during daylight. At night the Germans counter-attacked certain portions of our line, supporting the advance of their infantry, as always, by heavy bombardment; but the strokes were not delivered with any great vigour and ceased about 2 a.m. During the day's fighting an anti-aircraft gun of the 3rd Army Corps succeeded in bringing down a German aeroplane. News was received also that a body of French cavalry had demolished part of the railway to the north, so cutting—at least temporarily—one line of communication which is of particular importance to the enemy.

On Saturday, the 19th, the bombardment was resumed by the Germans at an early hour, and continued intermittently under reply from our own guns. Some of their

infantry advanced from cover, apparently with the intention of attacking, but on coming under fire they retired. Otherwise the day was uneventful except for the activity of the artillery, which is now a matter of normal routine rather than an event. Another hostile aeroplane was brought down by us; and one of our airmen succeeded in dropping several bombs over the German lines, one incendiary bomb falling with considerable effect on a transport park near La Fère. A buried store of the enemy's munitions of war was also found not far from the Aisne, 10 wagon loads of live shell and two wagons of cable being dug up; and traces were discovered of large quantities of stores having been burnt, all tending to show that so far back as the Aisne the German retirement was hurried. There was a strong wind during the day, accompanied by driving rain, and this militated against aerial reconnaissance.

On Sunday, the 20th, nothing of importance occurred until the afternoon, when there was a break in the clouds and an interval of feeble sunshine, which, however, was hardly powerful enough to warm the soaking troops. The Germans took advantage of this brief spell of fine weather to make several separate counter-attacks against different points. These were all repulsed with loss to the enemy; but the casualties incurred by us were by no means light. In one section of our firing line the occupants of the trenches were under the impression that they heard a military band in the enemy's lines just before the attack developed. It is now known that the German infantry started their advance with bands playing. The offensive against one or two points was renewed at dusk with no greater success.

The brunt of the resistance has naturally fallen upon the infantry. In spite of the fact that they have been drenched to the skin for some days and their trenches have been deep in mud and water, and in spite of incessant night alarms and of the almost continuous bombardment to which they have been subjected, they have on every occasion been ready for the enemy's infantry when the latter have attempted to assault, and they have beaten

•

them back with great loss. Indeed, the sight of the *Pickelhauben* coming up has been a positive relief after the long trying hours of inaction under shell fire. The object of the great proportion of artillery the Germans employ is to beat down the resistance of their enemy by a concentrated and prolonged fire and to shatter their nerve with high explosives before the infantry attack is launched. They seem to have relied on doing this with us; but they have not done so, though it has taken them several costly experiments to discover this fact. From the statements of prisoners, indeed, it appears that they have been greatly disappointed by the moral effect produced by their heavy guns, which, despite the actual losses inflicted, has not been at all commensurate with the colossal expenditure of ammunition, which has really been wasted.

By this it is not implied that their artillery fire is not good. It is more than good; it is excellent. But the British soldier is a difficult person to impress or depress, even by immense shells filled with high explosives which detonate with terrific violence and form craters large enough to act as graves for five horses. The German howitzer shells are 8 to 9 inches in calibre, and on impact they send up columns of greasy black smoke. On account of this they are irreverently dubbed "Coal-boxes," "Black Marias," or "Jack Johnsons" by the soldiers. Men who take things in this spirit are, it seems, likely to throw out the calculations based on loss of *moral* so carefully framed by the German military philosophers.

A considerable amount of information about the enemy has by now been gleaned from prisoners. It has been gathered that our bombardment on the 15th produced a great impression. The opinion is also recorded that our infantry make such good use of the ground that the German companies are decimated by our rifle fire before a British soldier can be seen. From an official diary captured by the 1st Army Corps it appears that one of the German Corps contains an extraordinary mixture of units. If the composition of the other corps is at all similar, it

may be assumed that the present efficiency of the enemy's forces is in no way comparable with what it was when war commenced. The losses in officers are noted as having been especially severe. A brigade is stated to be commanded by a major, and some companies of the Foot Guards to be commanded by one-year volunteers, while after the battle of Montmirail one regiment lost 55 out of 60 officers.

The prisoners recently captured appreciate the fact that the march on Paris has failed and that their forces are retreating, but state that the object of this movement is explained by the officers as being to withdraw into closer touch with supports which have stayed too far in rear. The officers are also endeavouring to encourage the troops by telling them that they will be at home by Christmas. A large number of the men, however, believe that they are beaten. The following is an extract from one document:—

“With the English troops we have great difficulties. They have a queer way of causing losses to the enemy. They make good trenches, in which they wait patiently. They carefully measure the ranges for their rifle fire, and they then open a truly hellish fire on the unsuspecting cavalry. This was the reason that we had such heavy losses. . . . According to our officers, the English striking forces are exhausted. The English people never really wanted war.”

From another source:—

“The English are very brave and fight to the last man. . . . One of our companies has lost 130 men out of 240.”

The following letter, which refers to the fighting on the Aisne, has been printed and circulated to the troops:—

LETTER FOUND ON A GERMAN OFFICER OF THE VIIITH
RESERVE CORPS.

CERNY, S. OF LAON,

September 17, 1914.

MY DEAR PARENTS,

. . . Our Corps has the task of holding the heights south of Cerny in all circumstances till the XVth Corps on

left flank can grip the enemy's flank. On our right are other corps. We are fighting with the English Guards, Highlanders, and Zouaves. The losses on both sides have been enormous. For the most part this is due to the too brilliant French artillery. The English are marvellously trained in making use of the ground. One never sees them, and one is constantly under fire. The French airmen perform wonderful feats. We cannot get rid of them. As soon as an airman has flown over us, 10 minutes later we get their shrapnel fire in our position. We have little artillery in our corps; without it we cannot get forward.

Three days ago our division took possession of these heights, dug itself in, etc. Two days ago, early in the morning, we were attacked by immensely superior English forces (one brigade and two battalions), and were turned out of our positions the fellows took five guns from us. It was a tremendous hand-to-hand fight. How I escaped myself I am not clear, I then had to bring up supports on foot (my horse was wounded, and the others were too far in rear). Then came up the Guard Jäger Battalion, 4th Jäger, 65th Regiment, Reserve Regiment 13, Landwehr Regiments 13 and 16, and, with the help of the artillery, drove back the fellows out of the position again.

Our machine-guns did excellent work. The English fell in heaps.

In our battalion three Iron Crosses have been given, one to the C.O., one to the Captain, one to the Surgeon. Let us hope that we shall be the lucky ones next time. . . . During the first two days of the battle I had only one piece of bread and no water, spent the night in the rain without my greatcoat. The rest of my kit was on the horses, which have been left miles behind with the baggage (which cannot come up into the battle), because as soon as you put your nose out from behind cover the bullets whistle. The war is terrible. We are all hoping that the decisive battle will end the war, as our troops have already got round Paris.

If we first beat the English, the French resistance will soon be broken. Russia will be very quickly dealt with, of this, there is no doubt. We received splendid help from the Austrian heavy artillery at Maubeuge. They bombarded Fort Cerfontaine in such a way that there was not 10 metres of parapet which did not show enormous

craters made by shells. The armoured turrets were found upside down.

Yesterday evening about 6 p.m., in the valley in which our reserves stood, there was such a terrible cannonade that we saw nothing of the sky but a cloud of smoke. We had few casualties.

Amongst items of news are the following: Recently a pilot and observer of the Royal Flying Corps were forced by a breakage in the aeroplane to descend in the enemy's lines. The pilot managed to "pancake" his machine down to earth, and the two escaped into some thick undergrowth in a wood. The enemy came up and seized the smashed machine, but did not search for our men with much zeal. The latter lay hid till dark, and then found their way to the Aisne, across which they swam, reaching camp in safety, but barefooted. Numerous floating bridges have by now been thrown across the Aisne, and some permanent bridges repaired, under fire. On the 20th a lieutenant of the 3rd Signal Company, Royal Engineers, was unfortunately drowned whilst attempting to swim across the river with a cable in order to open up fresh telegraph communication on the north side.

Espionage is still carried on by the enemy to a considerable extent. Recently the suspicions of some French troops were aroused by coming across a farm from which the horses had not been removed. After some search they discovered a telephone which was connected by an underground cable with the German lines; and the owner of the farm paid the penalty usual in war for his treachery.

After some cases of village fighting which occurred earlier in the war it was reported by some of our officers that the Germans had attempted to approach to close quarters by forcing prisoners to march in front of them. The Germans have recently repeated the same trick on a larger scale against the French, as is shown by the copy of the order printed below. It is therein referred to as a "ruse"; but if that term be accepted, it is distinctly an illegal ruse.

—Army.
General Staff.
3rd Bureau.
No.

September, 1914.

During a recent night attack the Germans drove a column of French prisoners in front of them.

This action is to be brought to the notice of all our troops:—

1. In order to put them on their guard against such a dastardly ruse:

2. In order that every soldier may know how the Germans treat their prisoners. Our troops must not forget that if they allow themselves to be taken prisoners the Germans will not fail to expose them to French bullets.

(Signature of Commander.)

Further evidence has now been collected of the misuse of the white flag and other signs of surrender during the action on the 17th, when owing to this one officer was shot. During the recent fighting also some German ambulance wagons advanced in order to collect the wounded. An order to cease fire was consequently given to our guns which were firing on this particular section of ground. The German battery commanders at once took advantage of the lull in the action to climb up their observation ladders and on to a haystack to locate our guns, which soon afterwards came under a far more accurate fire than any to which they had been subjected up to that time.

A British officer who was captured by the Germans and has since escaped reports that while a prisoner he saw men who had been fighting subsequently put on Red Cross brassards. That the irregular use of the protection afforded by the Geneva Convention is not uncommon is confirmed by the fact that on one occasion men in the uniform of combatant units have been captured wearing the Red Cross brassard hastily slipped over the arm. The excuse given has been that they had been detailed after a fight to look after the wounded. It is reported by a cavalry officer that the driver of a motor-car with a machine gun mounted on it, which he captured, was wearing the Red Cross.

Full details of the actual damage done to the Cathedral

at Reims will doubtless have been cabled home, so that no description of it is necessary. The Germans bombarded the Cathedral twice with their heavy artillery. One reason why it caught alight so quickly was that on one side of it was some scaffolding which had been erected for restoration work. Straw had also been laid on the floor for the reception of German wounded. It is to the credit of the French that practically all the German wounded were successfully extricated from the burning building. There was no justification on military grounds for this act of vandalism, which seems to have been caused by the exasperation born of failure, a sign of impotence rather than of strength. It is noteworthy that a well-known hotel not far from the Cathedral, which was kept by a German, was not touched.

III

OPERATIONS ON THE AISNE

(September 21—October 12, 1914.)

September 25, 1914.

For four days there has been a comparative lull all along our front. This has been accompanied by a spell of fine weather, though the nights are now much colder. One cannot have everything, however, and one evil result of the sunshine has been to release the flies which were torpid during the wet days. Advantage has been taken of the arrival of reinforcements to relieve by fresh troops the men who have been in the firing line for some time. Several units, therefore, have received their baptism of fire during the week.

Since the last letter left General Headquarters evidence has been received which points to the fact that during the counter-attacks on the night of Sunday, the 20th, the German infantry fired into each other--the result of an attempt to carry out the dangerous expedient of a converging advance in the dark. Opposite one portion of our position a considerable massing of the hostile forces was observed before dark, and some hours later a furious fusillade was heard in front of our line, though no bullets came over our trenches.

This narrative begins with the 21st and covers only two days. On Monday, the 21st, there was but little rain, and the weather took the turn for the better, which has been maintained. Action was practically confined to the artillery, our guns at one point shelling and driving away the enemy, who were endeavouring to construct a redoubt. The Germans for their part expended a large

number of heavy shells in a long-range bombardment of the village of Missy. Reconnoitring parties sent out during the night of the 21st-22nd discovered some deserted trenches, and in them, or near them in the woods, over 100 dead and wounded were picked up. A number of rifles, ammunition, and equipment were also found. There were various other signs that portions of the enemy's forces had withdrawn for some distance.

Tuesday, the 22nd, was also fine, with less wind, and was one of the most uneventful days that has passed since we reached the Aisne—uneventful, that is, for the British. There was less artillery work on either side, the Germans, nevertheless, giving the village of Paissy a taste of the "Jack Johnsons." The spot thus honoured is not far from a ridge where some of the most severe close fighting in which we have taken part has occurred. All over this "No man's land" between the lines the bodies of the German infantry are still lying in heaps where they have fallen at different times.

Espionage plays so large a part in the conduct of war by the Germans that it is difficult to avoid further reference to the subject. They have evidently never forgotten the saying of Frederick the Great:—"When Marshal Soubise goes to war he is followed by a hundred cooks. When I take the field I am preceded by a hundred spies." Indeed, until about 20 years ago there was a paragraph in their Field Service Regulations directing that the service of "protection in the field," *e.g.*, outposts and advanced guards, should always be supplemented by a system of espionage. Though such instructions are no longer made public, the Germans, as is well known, still carry them into effect.

Apart from the more elaborate arrangements which were made in peace time for obtaining information by paid agents, some of the methods being employed for the collection or conveyance of intelligence are as follows:—

Men in plain clothes signal to the German lines from points in the hands of the enemy by means of coloured lights at night and puffs of smoke from chimneys by day. Pseudo-labourers working in the fields between the armies

have been detected conveying information, and persons in plain clothes have acted as advanced scouts to the German cavalry when advancing. German officers and soldiers in plain clothes or in French or British uniforms have remained in localities evacuated by the Germans in order to furnish them with intelligence. One spy of this kind was found by our troops hidden in a church tower. His presence was only discovered through the erratic movements of the hands of the church clock, which he was using to signal to his friends by means of an improvised semaphore code. Had this man not been seized it is probable that he would have signalled to the German artillery the time of arrival and the exact location of the headquarters and staff of the force. High-explosive shells would then have mysteriously dropped on to the building. Women spies have also been caught, and secret agents have been found at rail-heads observing entrainments and detrainments.

It is a simple matter for spies to mix with the numbers of refugees moving about to and from their homes, and difficult for our troops, who speak neither French nor German, to detect them. The French have found it necessary to search villages and also the casual wayfarers on the roads for carrier pigeons. Amongst the precautions taken by us to guard against spying is the publication of the following notice, copies of which have been printed in French and posted up:—

- (1) Motor-cars and bicycles other than those carrying soldiers in uniform may not circulate on the roads.
- (2) Inhabitants may not leave the localities in which they reside between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m.
- (3) Inhabitants may not quit their homes after 8 p.m.
- (4) No person may on any pretext pass through the British lines without an authorization countersigned by a British officer.

Events have moved so quickly during the last two months that anything connected with the mobilization

of the British Expeditionary Force is now ancient history. Nevertheless, the following extract of a German order is evidence of the mystification of the enemy and is a tribute to the value of the secrecy which was so well and loyally maintained at the time in England:—

10th Reserve Army Corps,
Headquarters, Mont St. Guibert,
20th August, 1914.

23.40.

CORPS ORDER, 21st August.

“The French troops in front of the 10th Army Corps have retreated south across the Sambre. Part of the Belgian Army has withdrawn to Antwerp. It is reported that an English Army has disembarked at Calais and Boulogne *en route* for Brussels.”

September 25 (?), 1914.

Wednesday, the 23rd, was a perfect autumn day. It passed without incident as regards major operations, though the enemy concentrated their heavy artillery fire upon the plateau near Paissy. Nothing more than inconvenience, however, was caused. The welcome absence of wind gave our airmen a chance of which they took full advantage, gathering much information.

Unfortunately, one of our aviators, who has been particularly active in annoying the enemy by dropping bombs, was wounded in a duel in the air. Being alone on a single-seater monoplane, he was not able to use a rifle, and whilst circling above a German two-seater in an endeavour to get within pistol-shot was hit by the observer of the latter, who was armed with a rifle. He managed to fly back over our lines, and by great good luck descended close to a motor-ambulance, which at once conveyed him to hospital. Against this may be set off the fact that another of our fliers exploded a bomb amongst some led artillery horses, killing several, and stampeding others.

On Thursday, the 24th, the fine weather continued, as did the lull in the action, the heavy German shells falling mostly near Pargnan. On both Wednesday and Thursday

the weather was so fine that many flights were made by the aviators of the French, the British, and the Germans, producing corresponding activity amongst the anti-aircraft guns. So still and clear was the atmosphere towards evening on Wednesday and during the whole of Thursday that to those not specially on the look-out the presence of aeroplanes high up above them was first made known by the bursting of the projectiles aimed at them. The puffs of smoke from the detonating shell hung in the air for minutes on end like balls of fleecy cotton-wool before they slowly expanded and were dissipated.

From the places mentioned as being the chief targets for the enemy's heavy howitzers it will be seen that the Germans are now inclined to concentrate their fire systematically upon definite areas in which their aviators think they have located our guns, or upon villages where it is imagined our troops may be billeted. The result will be to give work to the local builders.

The growing resemblance of this battle to siege warfare has already been pointed out. The fact that the latter actions of the Russo-Japanese War assumed a similar character was thought by many to have been due to exceptional causes, such as the narrowness of the theatre of operations between the Chinese frontier on the west and the mountainous country of Northern Korea on the east, and the lack of roads, which limited the extent of ground over which it was possible for the rival armies to manœuvre, and the fact that both forces were tied to one line of railway.

No such factors are exerting any influence on the present battle. Nevertheless a similar situation has been produced, owing, first, to the immense power of resistance possessed by any army which is amply equipped with heavy artillery and has sufficient time to fortify itself; and, secondly, to the vast size of the forces engaged, which at present stretch more than half across France. The extent of country covered is so great as to render slow any efforts to manœuvre and march round to a flank in order to escape the costly expedient of a frontal attack against heavily fortified positions. To state that

methods of attack must approximate more closely to those of siege warfare, the greater the resemblance of the defences to those of a fortress, is a platitude; but it is one which will bear repetition if it in any way assists to make the present situation clear.

There is no doubt that the position on the Aisne was not hastily selected by the German Staff after the retreat had begun. From the choice of ground and the care with which the fields of fire have been arranged to cover all possible avenues of approach, and from the amount of work already carried out, it is clear that the contingency of having to act on the defensive was not overlooked when the details of the strategically offensive campaign were arranged.

September 29, 1914.

The general situation as viewed on the map remains practically the same as that described in the last letter; and the task of the Army has not changed. It is to maintain itself until the general resumption of the offensive. No ground has been lost, some has been gained, and every counter-attack has been repulsed, in certain instances with very severe loss to the enemy.

Nevertheless, the question of position is only part of the battle, and there has been a considerable improvement in the situation in another important respect. The recent offensive efforts of the enemy have been made without cohesion, the assaults being delivered by comparatively small bodies acting without co-operation with those on either side. Some of them, indeed, evince clear signs of inferior leadership, thus bearing out the statements made by prisoners as to the great losses in officers suffered by the enemy.

Further, the hostile artillery fire has decreased in volume and deteriorated both in control and direction. The first is probably due to a transfer of metal to other quarters, but the two latter may be a direct result of the activity of our aircraft and their interference with the enemy's air reconnaissance and observation of fire. Recently the Germans have been relying to some extent

on observation from captive balloons sent up at some distance in rear of their first line, which method, whatever its cause, is a poor substitute for the direct overhead reconnaissance obtainable from aeroplanes.

As a consequence the damage being done to us is wholly disproportionate to the amount of ammunition expended by the enemy. For the last few days it has amounted to pitting certain areas with large craters and in rendering some villages "unhealthy"—as the soldiers put it. A concrete example of what was on one occasion achieved against our infantry trenches is given later.

Of recent events the actual narrative will be carried on from the 25th to the 29th inclusive. During the whole of this period the weather has remained fine, though not so bright as it was. On Friday, the 25th, comparative quiet reigned in our sphere of action, the only incident worthy of special mention being the passage of a German aeroplane over the interior of our lines. It was flying high, but drew a general fusillade from below, with the result that the pilot was killed outright and the observer was wounded. By the aid of dual control, however, the latter continued his flight for some miles. He was then forced to descend by a hit in his petrol tank and was captured by the French.

That night a general attack was made against the greater part of the Allies' position, and it was renewed in the early morning of the 26th. The Germans were everywhere repulsed with loss. Indeed, opposite one portion of our line, where they were caught in mass by our machine guns and howitzers firing at different ranges, it is estimated that they left 1,000 killed and wounded.

The mental attitude of our troops may be gauged from the fact that the official report next morning from one Corps—of which one division had borne the brunt of the fighting—ran thus laconically:—

" . . . The night was quiet, except for a certain amount of shelling both from the enemy and ourselves. At 3.40 a.m. an attack was made on our right. At 5 a.m. there was a general attack on the right of the —th Division, but not really heavy, and firing is dying down."

Further ineffectual efforts to drive us back were made on Saturday, the 26th, at 8 a.m., and in the afternoon; and artillery fire continued all day. The Germans came on in a T-shaped formation, several lines shoulder to shoulder, followed almost immediately by a column in support. After a very few minutes the men had closed up into a mob, which afforded an excellent target for our fire.

On Sunday, the 27th, whilst the German heavy guns were in action, their brass bands could be heard playing hymn tunes, presumably at Divine Service. The enemy made an unimportant advance on part of our line about 6 p.m. and renewed it in strength at one point at 11.30 p.m.

-with no better success than on the previous night. Sniping continued all day along the whole front. On Monday, the 28th, there was nothing more severe than bombardment and intermittent sniping, and this inactivity continued during Tuesday, the 29th, except for a night-attack against our extreme right.

An incident that occurred on Sunday, the 27th, serves to illustrate the type of fighting that has for the past two weeks been going on intermittently in various parts of our line. It also brings out the extreme difficulty of ascertaining what is actually happening during an action, apart from what seems to be happening, and points to the value of good entrenchments. At a certain point in our front our advanced trenches on the north of the Aisne are not far from a village on the hillside and also within a short distance of the German works, being on the slope of a spur formed by a subsidiary valley running north and the main valley of the river.

It was a calm, sunny afternoon, but hazy; and from a point of vantage south of the river it was difficult exactly to locate on the far bank the well-concealed trenches of either side. From far and near the sullen boom of guns echoed along the valley, and at intervals, in different directions, the sky was flecked with the almost motionless smoke of anti-aircraft shrapnel. Suddenly, without any warning, for the reports of the distant howitzers from which they were fired could not be distinguished from

other distant reports, three or four heavy shells fell into the village, sending up huge clouds of smoke and dust which slowly ascended in a brownish-grey column. To this no reply was made by our side.

Shortly afterwards there was a quick succession of reports from a point some distance up the subsidiary valley on the side opposite our trenches, and therefore rather on their flank. It was not possible, either by ear or by eye, to locate the guns from which these sounds proceeded.

Almost simultaneously, as it seemed, there was a corresponding succession of flashes and sharp detonations in a line on the hillside along what appeared to be our trenches. There was then a pause and several clouds of smoke rose slowly and remained stationary, spaced as regularly as a line of poplars. Again there was a succession of reports from the German quickfirers on the far side of the misty valley, and—like echoes—the detonations of high-explosive and the row of expanding smoke clouds was prolonged by several new ones. Another pause, and silence, except for the noise in the distance. After a few minutes there was a roar from our side of the main valley as our field guns opened one after another in a more deliberate fire upon the position of the German guns.

After six reports there was again silence, save for the whirl of the shells as they sang up the small valley, and then followed the flashes and balls of smoke—one, two, three, four, five, six, as the shrapnel burst nicely over what in the haze looked like some ruined buildings at the edge of a wood.

Again, after a short interval, the enemy's gunners reopened with a burst, still further prolonging the smoke, which was by now merged into one solid screen above a considerable length of trench, and again did our guns reply. And so the duel went on for some time. Ignoring our guns, the German artillerymen, probably relying on concealment for immunity, were concentrating all their efforts in a particularly forceful effort to enfilade our trenches. For them it must have appeared to be the

chance of a lifetime, and with their customary prodigality of ammunition they continued to pour bouquet after bouquet of high-explosive *Einheitsgeschoss*, or combined shrapnel and common shell, on to our works. Occasionally, with a roar, a high-angle projectile would sail over the hill and blast a gap in the village. One could only pray that our men holding the trenches had dug themselves in deep and well, and that those in the village were in the cellars.

In the hazy valleys bathed in sunlight not a man, not a horse, not a gun, nor even a trench was to be seen. There were only flashes, smoke, and noise. Above, against the blue sky, were several round white clouds hanging in the track of the only two visible human souls—represented by a glistening speck in the air. On high also were to be heard the more or less gentle reports of the bursts of the anti-aircraft projectiles. But the deepest impression created was one of sympathy for the men subjected to the bursts along that trench.

Upon inquiry as to the losses sustained, however, it was found that our men had been able to take care of themselves and had dug themselves well in. In that collection of trenches on that Sunday afternoon were portions of four battalions of British soldiers—the Dorsets, the West Kents, the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, and the King's Own Scottish Borderers. Over 300 projectiles were fired against them. The result was nine men wounded.

On the following day 109 shells were fired at the trenches occupied by the West Kent Regiment alone. Four officers were buried, but dug out unhurt. One man was scratched. The village itself was unoccupied.

Many camp yarns are now in circulation amongst the troops, mostly of an amusing nature. For instance, a report is current that the Turcos, who are our close neighbours, have been rather short of food, and have bartered the use of two heavy guns for 10,000 tins of ration beef. A market rate of exchange between guns and "bully," however, has not yet been worked out. The troops in second line at certain spots pass the time by punting a

football about on the village "*places.*" It is rumoured that a German aviator who observed this sent in a report that the British forces were thoroughly disorganized and running about their post in blind panic.

October 1 (?), 1914

In the presentation of striking contrasts this war is no exception to the rule. Within sight of the spot where these words are being penned the chauffeur of a General Staff motor-car is completing his morning toilette in the open. After washing hands and face in a saucepan minus handle, which he has balanced on an empty petrol-can, he carefully brushes his hair with an old nail-brush, using the window of the car, in which he has slept, as a looking-glass. From the backward sweep he gives his somewhat long locks, and judging by his well-cut and clean, but dull brogue shoes, it is clear that he has once been a "*knut,*" in spite of his oil-stained khaki service jacket and trousers. He is, in fact, an ex-public school boy who enlisted for the war to do his bit for his country, and a right useful part he is playing.

The resignation with which many of the inhabitants accept whatever happens is a remarkable feature of the situation. They seem in no way perturbed by the incursion of strange officers and men billeted on them, whose presence, even if they appear in the shape of deliverers, must be at least a great inconvenience. At the dinner hour, yesterday, in a house which at ordinary times is a second-class *café* in a small country town, this trait was exhibited to a curious degree. The main entrance of the *café* opens on to a combined entrance-hall and kitchen containing a long zinc-covered table, and furnished with a large cooking-range. Whilst the officers billeted in the house were eating lunch and smoking in the salon next door, a continuous stream of orderlies, motor-cyclist despatch riders, intelligence agents, telegraph operators, and staff officers were passing through the hall, one soldier servant was frying something at the range, and others were slicing tomatoes and onions at one end of the table.

Quite unperturbed, amidst a cloud of flies, the *patron*, his wife, and family were discussing their own *déjeuner* with gusto, immersed in their own affairs and also in a shower of grease, for they were eating artichokes, each petal of which was first dipped in a bowl of melted butter and conveyed to the mouth with a flourish. There was so much noise that it was impossible from inside the house to hear the incessant booming of the guns. Within half a mile of this bustling scene, palpitating with life, however, was a different picture. In the clearing hospital to which the wounded had been brought from the dressing stations behind the firing line were rows of our wounded men. In here there was no difficulty in discerning the distant roar of artillery with which the air outside quivered.

It is always instructive to regard matters from the opposing point of view; and the following further extracts from the letters of prisoners may be of interest:—

“ In all places we passed through we found wounded and many parties of men with bandaged arms and hands. On the 15th (September) we reached a village in which we thought we should get some rest, but we had hardly gone to the field kitchens for our food when shrapnel started bursting near our regiment, which was in close formation. We at once sought cover in some houses. At 6 o'clock our company was ordered to move up to a wood in order to protect our artillery, which was coming into action in a field, the rest of the battalion marching northwards. On the 16th we advanced, covered by our guns. The enemy was hidden in bushes, and some were firing from houses into our trenches, which were not more than 100 yards from the village. To my right and left wounded comrades were complaining bitterly that the enemy, shooting from the houses, found too easy a mark in us. If we assumed an upright position we were immediately fired on. Two of our soldiers endeavoured to carry a wounded man to the rear; one was killed and the other was wounded in the attempt. Soon the enemy's bullets began to get us from the right, and after about one hour, during which time the Company lost about 25 men, we were forced to retire. This brought our total strength down to 80 (we started 251 men). We had no officers left. . . . On the 18th, at 4.30 a.m., we

reached a village where we thought we expected to be able to rest, and collected some straw. Before half an hour had passed, however, the shrapnel again found us out. We spent the afternoon in the village, which was continuously under shell fire, in spite of the fact that our guns were shelling the enemy's artillery. We heard our Colonel say that our guns could not get at those of the enemy satisfactorily, as the latter were so well concealed. . . . Our condition is now really awful, for we have to lie out in all weathers; and we are all looking forward to a speedy end. We are very badly off as regards food. . . . Some of our regiments can only muster three to four companies."

(The enemy referred to are the French.)

Another letter written during the retreat in front of the French from Montmirail contains the following:—

"After a 36-hours' march we had a rest, and arrived just in time for the fight. For three days we did not have a hot meal, because our field kitchens were lost. We got a hot meal yesterday evening. Though we are all just ready to drop, we must march on."

Yet two more extracts:—

"We found great quantities of food, but for fear of poison did not take possession of it until we had got hold of the proprietor of the house and forced him to taste it.

We are near Reims, after having gone through hard, bloody and most horrible days. Thank God I am still alive. Of our regiment of 3,000 men there are now only 1,600. Let us hope that this battle—which ought to be one of the greatest in history—will leave me safe and well, and give us peace. I am absolutely done, but we must not despair."

October 3 (?), 1914.

Wednesday, September 30, merely marked another day's progress in the gradual development of the situation, and was distinguished by no activity beyond slight attacks by the enemy. There was also artillery fire at intervals. One of our airmen succeeded in dropping nine bombs, some of which fell on the enemy's rolling-stock collected on the railway near Laon. Some of the enemy's

front trenches were found empty at night; but nothing much can be deduced from this fact, for they are frequently evacuated in this way, no doubt to prevent the men in the back line firing on their comrades in front of them.

Thursday, October 1, was a most perfect autumn day, and the most peaceful that there has been since the two forces engaged on the Aisne. There was only desultory gunfire as targets offered. During the night the enemy made a few new trenches. A French aviator dropped one bomb on a railway station and three bombs on troops massed near it.

The weather on Friday, the 2nd, was very misty in the early hours, and it continued hazy until the late afternoon, becoming thicker again at night. The Germans were driven out of a mill which they had occupied as an advanced post, their guns and machine guns which supported it being knocked out one by one by well-directed artillery fire from a flank. During the night they made the usual two attacks on the customary spot in our lines, and as on previous occasions were repulsed. Two of their trenches were captured and filled in. Our loss was six wounded men.

Up to September 21 the air mileage made by our airmen since the beginning of the war amounted to 87,000 miles, an average of 2,000 miles per day, the total equalling nearly four times the circuit of the world. The total time spent in the air was 1,400 hours.

There are many points connected with the fighting methods of either side that may be of interest. The following description was given by a Battalion Commander who has been at the front since the commencement of hostilities and has fought both in the open and behind entrenchments. It must, however, be borne in mind that it only represents the experiences of a particular unit. It deals with the tactics of the enemy's infantry:—

“The important points to watch are the heads of valleys and ravines, woods—especially those on the sides of hollow ground—and all dead ground to the front and flanks. The German officers are skilled in leading troops

forward under cover, in closed bodies, but once the latter are deployed and there is no longer direct personal leadership the men will not face heavy fire. Sometimes the advance is made in a series of lines, with the men well opened out at five or six paces interval; at other times it is made in a line, with the men almost shoulder to shoulder, followed in all cases by supports in close formation. The latter either waver when the front line is checked, or crowd on to it, moving forward under the orders of their officers, and the mass forms a magnificent target. Prisoners have described the fire of our troops as pinning them to the ground, and this is certainly borne out by their action.

“When the Germans are not heavily entrenched no great losses are incurred in advancing against them by the methods in which the British Army has been instructed. For instance, in one attack over fairly open ground against about an equal force of infantry sheltered in a sunken road and in ditches we lost only 10 killed and 60 wounded, while over 400 of the enemy surrendered after about 50 had been killed. Each side had the support of a battery, but the fight for superiority from infantry fire took place at about 700 yards and lasted only half an hour. When the Germans were wavering some of them put up the white flag, but others went on firing, and our men continued to do the same. Eventually a large number of white flags, improvised from handkerchiefs, pieces of shirt, white biscuit bags, etc., were exhibited all along the line, and many men hoisted their helmets on their rifles.

“In the fighting behind entrenchments the Germans endeavour to gain ground by making advances in line at dusk or just before dawn, and then digging themselves in, in the hope no doubt that they may eventually get so near as to be able, as at *manceuvres*, to reach the hostile trenches in a single rush. They have never succeeded in doing this against us. If by creeping up in dead ground they do succeed in gaining ground by night, they are easily driven back by fire in the morning. A few of the braver men sometimes remain behind, at ranges of even

300 or 400 yards, and endeavour to inflict losses by sniping. Sharpshooters, also, are often noticed in trees or wriggling about until they get good cover. The remedy is to take the initiative and detail men to deal with the enemy's sharpshooters.

"A few night attacks have been made against us. Before one of them a party crept up close to the British line and set alight a hayrick, so that it should form a beacon on which the centre of the attacking line marched. Generally, however, in the night and early morning attacks, groups of 40 or 50 men have come on, the groups sometimes widely separated one from another and making every endeavour to obtain any advantage from cover. Light-balls and search-lights have on some occasions been used. Latterly the attacks have become more and more half-hearted. Against us the enemy has never closed with the bayonet. The German trenches I have seen were deep enough to shelter a man when firing standing, and had a step down in rear for the supports to sit in.

"As regards our own men, there was at first considerable reluctance to entrench, as has always been the case at the commencement of a war. Now, however, having bought experience dearly, their defences are such that they can defy the German artillery fire."

On the lighter side of the picture is the following anecdote, which is current, though its absolute truth is not vouched for.

On a recent occasion a British Cavalry subaltern who was cut off from his men, hid in the edge of a wood by a road. It was not long before he saw an unsuspecting armed German soldier patrolling the road. He could have shot the man without warning, but felt that it would be akin to murder to kill him in cold blood. In order to instil a little of the spirit of combat into the affair, therefore, he crept out of cover, ran up behind the "Bosch," as our Allies would call him, and gave him a ferocious kick. Instead of showing fight the startled and pained German gave a yell and ran for dear life, leaving the subaltern laughing too hard to shoot.

October 7 (?), 1914.

The comparative calm on our front has continued. Though fine and considerably warmer, the last six days have been slightly misty, with clouds hanging low, so that the conditions have not been very favourable for aerial reconnaissance. In regard to the latter, it is astonishing how quickly the habit is acquired—even by those who are not aviators—of thinking of the weather in terms of its suitability for flying. There has been a bright moon also, which has militated against night attacks.

On Saturday, the 3rd, practically nothing happened, except that each side shelled the other towards evening. On Sunday there was a similar absence of activity. Opposite one portion of the line the enemy's bands played patriotic airs, and the audiences which gathered gave a chance to our waiting howitzers. Not only do their regimental bands perform occasionally, but with their proverbial fondness for music the Germans have in some places got gramophones in their trenches.

On Monday, the 5th, there were three separate duels in the air between French and German aviators, one of which was visible from our trenches. Two of the struggles were, so far as could be seen, indecisive, but in the third the French airmen were victorious and brought down their opponents, both of whom were killed, by machine-gun fire. The observer was so burnt as to be unrecognizable. During the day some men of the Landwehr were taken prisoners by us. They were in very poor condition, and wept copiously when captured. One, on being asked what he was crying for, explained that, though they had been advised to surrender to the English, they believed that they would be shot. On that evening our airmen had an unusual amount of attention paid to them both by the German aviators and their artillery of every description. One of our infantry patrols discovered 150 dead Germans in a wood $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles to our front. We sent out a party to bury them, but it was fired upon and had to withdraw.

On Tuesday, the 6th, the enemy's guns were active in

the afternoon. It is believed that the bombardment was due to anger because two of our howitzer shells had detonated right in one of the enemy's trenches which was full of men. Three horses were killed by the German fire. Wednesday, the 7th, was uneventful. On Thursday, the 8th, the shelling by the enemy of the locality on our front, which has so far been the scene of their greatest efforts, was again continuous.

Opposite one or two points the Germans have attempted to gain ground by sapping, in some places with a view secretly to pushing forward machine guns in advance of their trenches so that they can suddenly sweep with cross fire the space between our line and theirs and so take any advance of ours in flank. It is reported that at one point where the French were much annoyed by the fire of a German machine gun which was otherwise inaccessible, they drove a mine gallery 50 metres long up to and under the emplacement, and blew up the gun. The men who drove the gallery belonged to a corps which is recruited in one of the coal-mining districts of France. The German machine guns are mounted on low sledges and are inconspicuous and evidently easily moved.

The fighting now consists mostly of shelling by the artillery of both sides, and in the front line of fire from machine guns, as an occasional target offers. Our Maxims have been doing excellent work and have proved most efficient weapons for the sort of fighting in which we are now engaged. At times there are so many outbursts of their fire in different directions that it is possible for an expert to tell by comparison which guns have their springs properly adjusted and are well "tuned up" for the day.

The amount of practice that our officers are now getting in the use of this weapon is proving most valuable in teaching them how to maintain it at concert pitch, as an instrument, and how to derive the best tactical results from its employment. Against us the Germans are not now expending so much gun ammunition as they have been, but they continue to fire at insignificant targets. They have a habit of suddenly dropping heavy shells without warning in localities or villages far behind our

front line, possibly on the chance of catching some of our troops in bivouac or billets. They also fire a few rounds at night.

Artillery has up to now played so great a part in the war that a few general remarks descriptive of the methods of its employment by the enemy are justified. Their field artillery armament consists of 15pr. Q.F. guns for the horse and field batteries of divisions, and there are, in addition, with each corps three to six batteries of 4.3in. field howitzers and about two batteries of 5.9in. howitzers. With an army there are some 8.2in. heavy howitzers.

The accuracy of their fire is apt at first to cause some alarm, more especially as the guns are usually well concealed and the position and the direction from which the fire is proceeding difficult of detection. But, accurate as is their shooting, the German gunners have on the whole had little luck; and during the past three weeks an astonishingly small proportion of the number of shells fired by them have been really effective. Quite the most striking feature of their handling of artillery is the speed with which they concentrate fire upon any selected point. They dispense to a great extent with the method of ranging known by us as "bracketing," especially when acting on the defensive, and direct fire by means of squared maps and telephone. Thus, when a target is found, its position on the map is telephoned to such batteries as it is desired to employ against that particular square.

In addition to the guns employed to fire on targets as they are picked up, others are told off to watch particular roads and to deal with any of the enemy using them. Both for the location of targets and the communication of the effect of fire, reliance is placed on observation from aeroplanes and balloons, and on information supplied by special observers and secret agents, who are sent out ahead or left behind in the enemy's lines to communicate by telephone or signal. These observers have been found in haystacks, barns, and other buildings well in advance of the German lines.

Balloons of the so-called "Sausage" pattern remain up in the air for long periods for the purpose of discovering targets; and until our aviators made their influence felt by chasing all hostile aeroplanes on sight the latter were continually hovering over our troops in order to "register" their positions and to note where headquarters, reserves, gun teams, etc., were located. If a suitable target is discovered, the airman drops a smoke ball directly over it or lets fall some strips of tinsel, which glitter in the sun as they slowly descend to earth.

The range to the target is apparently ascertained by those near the guns by means of a large telemeter, or other range-finder, which is kept trained on the aeroplane, so that when the signal is made the distance to the target vertically below is at once obtained. A few rounds are then fired, and the result signalled back by the aviator according to some prearranged code.

October 9, 1914.

In spite of the perfection of their arrangements for ranging and observation there has been much waste of ammunition by the Germans. For instance, within an area of two acres on our side of the Aisne there are over one hundred craters made by their heavy high-explosive shell. This shower of projectile, which must have cost some £1,000, did absolutely no damage, for the locality never happened to be occupied whilst it was being bombarded. It also incidentally illustrates one weak point of indirect fire when unaccompanied by observation. Another example of prodigality in ammunition is the continued shelling of Reims. This is still carried on at intervals, and on the 6th resulted in the deaths of an entire family of eight people. On the 7th twelve of the inhabitants were hit.

On the other hand, concealment of their own guns—as of all their troops—has been most carefully practised by the Germans; and they construct alternative emplacements so that when one position is made too hot another can be taken up without loss of time.

Ever since the South African War the desirability of rendering troops as invisible as possible has been generally recognized in all armies, and this war has thrown much light on the matter. It appears that at long ranges the uniform matters little; the blue coat and red trousers of the French infantry and cavalry not being any more conspicuous than the clothes of our own men or of the Germans. But at medium ranges the red trousers of our Allies show up very clearly. When infantry are lying down, however, their *képis* are not so easily seen as our own flat-topped forage caps. From the interrogation of prisoners it has been ascertained that at medium ranges both French and British officers are very easily distinguishable from their men, and that selected marksmen provided with field-glasses are specially told off from each platoon of German infantry to pick off officers. The French officer is betrayed by the greater visible length of his red trousers and by his accoutrements, whilst the British officer is "given away" by his sword, his open jacket with low collar and tie, his Sam Browne belt, and the absence of a pack. Even such trifling differences as the colour or cut of the breeches are said to be noticeable. The Germans certainly do employ snipers, and some have been found on church towers, up trees, and in houses. One of them succeeded in killing two of our officers and wounding two more before he was accounted for.

Some of our prisoners report that their officers have been ordered to remove their distinguishing shoulder-straps. But this may be in order not to convey information to the enemy as to the units to which they belong. At any rate, to judge from the officers already captured, the order has not been carried out generally.

The following notification to his troops by one of the French Army Commanders bears upon German methods of warfare:—

"The Germans have forced some prisoners of war to remain in their trenches. When the French advanced, under the impression that the trenches were in possession of their own side, they were fired on at close range."

That this has actually been done is fully confirmed, with illuminating detail as to the German methods of war in the twentieth century, by an entry in a captured field notebook. It runs thus:—

“*16th September.*—At dawn the shelling began. We retired with the prisoners. My two prisoners work hard at digging trenches. At midday I got the order to rejoin at the village with them. I was very glad, as I had been ordered to shoot them as soon as the enemy advanced. Thank God, it was not necessary.”

On the other hand, an example is given of an order which prescribes only legal and suitable precautions—except as regards the shooting of hostages—for self-protection in an enemy country. It was issued some time ago.

AIX LA CHAPELLE,

August 10, 1914.

To protect ourselves from the extremely hostile attitude of the Belgian population, it is necessary to take very vigorous and energetic measures against non-combatants who take part in the struggle. For this purpose no fire-arms or explosives must be retained by them.

It is, therefore, ordered that before a locality is occupied, a detachment of all arms will march in ahead of the columns and warn the population through the Mayor and local clergy to deliver up all arms, ammunition, and explosives.

After they have handed over their arms the inhabitants will be collected outside the locality, and the houses and gardens will be searched. If any arms are found, hostages will be executed and the place set on fire.

When the inhabitants are summoned to surrender their arms, they will be informed of the penalties to which they expose themselves by non-compliance.

The arms will be destroyed and the explosives thrown into water.

(Sgd.) VON QUAST,

Comm'dg. IX. A.C.

Another German order—of the 2nd Army—is quoted because it is possibly significant of the present state of Germany's military resources:—

"The Minister of War wishes to impress upon all the necessity for searching the field of battle with the greatest care for all warlike material belonging to our own army, such as:—Field-glasses, waterbottles, haversacks, rifles, cartridges, also limbers and supply wagons, which can be used again for new formations. In addition to this, units must take care to pick up unexpended ammunition and empty cartridge cases."

The lull in the operations on our immediate front pending a general advance affords an opportunity (to-day, October 9, 1914) for giving some further description of the country in which we are operating, and of the valley of the Aisne in particular.

The different rivers which cut across the line of advance in the direction of Laon have already been enumerated. Any northward move from the Marne traverses the Department of the Aisne, which is one of several departments included in the district of Champagne. To our right rear lies the southern half of the district called La Champagne Pouilleuse, which owing to the nature of its soil is the most famous wine district of France, indeed of the world, where the lower slopes of the undulating country are covered with vineyards for miles. We are, however, more concerned with the area immediately ahead of us, which is the higher portion of two plateaux which are connected by the line of slopes known as La Falaise de la Champagne, forming the original French defensive position running from La Fère through Laon to Reims. This area consists of a fairly open plateau, intersected by the depressions down which run the watercourses of the westward flowing rivers. Between the Marne and Laon, though there are a few vineyards, the country is not wine-growing to the same degree as is that south of Reims and round Epernay. On the slopes of the Aisne Valley itself, the vineyards are few and far between, and only to be found in favoured spots.

The Aisne flows right across our front, following a tortuous course along the bottom of the valley some hundred metres below the edge of the plateau on either bank. It is a placid stream between 150 and 200 feet in width, and unfordable. The bottom of the valley

down which it meanders consists of practically flat meadowland intersected by the various roads leading north and south over the bridges which span the river. These roads are for the most part lined with poplars or fruit trees, whose military significance lies in the fact that they screen the movement of troops along the roads, though, on the other hand, they make the position of the latter conspicuous from afar.

There are several villages either actually on the banks of the river or nestling on the slopes of the valley. The chief place along the British front is Soissons, a town lying on the left bank at a pronounced bend northwards. The villages on the river itself are of considerable tactical importance, since most of the bridges are close to them. They have therefore been the targets of the German artillery, and some are now no more than masses of ruins. Several of the hamlets at some distance from the Aisne and on its left bank have formed the objects of similar attentions from the enemy's guns—probably because they might serve as points of concentration for our troops—as have also the greater number of the roads winding down the hillsides facing north and leading across the meadows, which afford the only channels of approach to our troops on the north side. In regard to the villages, one point which strikes a fresh eye is their compactness, for in most of them the houses are clustered together in one mass, outlying houses being rare. When on a hillside, they line the road, sometimes almost entirely on one side. There are also, of course, outlying chateaux and farms which are quite isolated.

The other main topographical features of the valley are two railways and a canal. At the village of Vailly, the light railway which to the east of that place skirts the foothills on the south side crosses over to the right bank and continues westward to Soissons. The double line joining Compiègne on the west with Reims on the east follows the lower hills on the south side from Soissons to Sermoise, and, at the latter point, turns south-east up the Vesle valley. From Condé, where it joins the Aisne, a canal runs parallel to the river on its left bank to

Bourg, where it is joined from the north-east by a branch canal carried across the river on an aqueduct.

Generally speaking, the slopes forming the north side of the valley are steeper than those of the south, but in other respects the two sides are very similar. Both are equally cut up into spurs and subsidiary valleys, the chief of the latter on the south being formed by the water-course of the Vesle, which extends south-eastwards through Braisne. Both on the north and south the slopes leading down to the Aisne are thickly wooded in patches, the woods in some places stretching away back over the edge of the plateau for some distance. On account of the existence of these woods on the edges of the slopes on our bank of the river, it is at many points only possible to obtain glimpses of short stretches of the opposite slopes, while the woods on that side screen large portions of the top of the plateau on the north.

Owing to the concealment afforded to the Germans' fire trenches and gun emplacements by the woods, and to the fact that nearly all the bridges and roads leading to them as well as a great part of the southern slopes are open to their fire, the position held by them is a very strong one. Except for these patches of wood, the terrain generally is not enclosed. No boundaries between the fields exist as in England. There are ditches here and there, but no hedges, wire fences, or walls, except round the enclosures in the villages. A large proportion of the woods, however, are enclosed by high rabbit-netting, which is in some places supported by iron stanchions. The top of the plateau on the south of the river to some extent resembles Salisbury Plain, except that the latter is downland while the former is cultivated, being sown with lucerne, wheat, and beetroot. The Aisne Valley is broader and deeper than any of those to be found on Salisbury Plain, and much more heavily wooded.

A feature of this part of the country, and one which is not confined to the neighbourhood of the Aisne, is the large number of caves, both natural and artificial, and of quarries. These are of great service to the forces on

both sides, since they can often be used as sheltered accommodation for the troops in the second line. Other points worthy of note are the excellence of the metalled roads, though the metalled portion is very narrow, and the comparative ease with which one can find one's way about, even without a map. This is due partly to the prevailing straightness of the roads, and partly to the absence of hedges. There are signposts at all cross roads, whilst the name of each village is posted in a conspicuous place at the entry and exit of the main highway passing through it. In addition to the absence of hedges, the tall white ferro-concrete telegraph-posts lining many of the main roads give a somewhat strange note to the landscape.

October 13, 1914.

From Friday, October 9, until Monday, the 12th, so little has occurred that the narrative of events can be given in a few words. There has been the usual sporadic shelling of our trenches, which has resulted in but little harm, so well dug in are our men; and on the night of the 10th the Germans made yet a fresh assault, supported by artillery fire, against the point which has all along attracted most of their attention. The attempt was again a costly failure, towards which our guns were able to contribute with great effect.

Details have now been received of an exciting encounter in mid-air. One of our aviators, on a fast scouting monoplane, sighted a hostile machine. He had two rifles fixed, one on either side of his engine, and at once gave chase, but lost sight of his opponent amongst some clouds. Soon, however, another machine hove into view, which turned out to be a German Otto biplane, a type of machine which is not nearly so fast as our scouts. Our officer once again started in pursuit. He knew that, owing to the position of the propeller on the hostile machine, he could not be fired at when astern of his opponent. At 60 yards' range he fired one rifle without apparent result; then, as his pace was carrying him ahead of his quarry, he turned round, and, again coming

to about the same distance behind, emptied his magazine at the German. The latter began at once to descend as if either he or his machine were hit.

Shutting off his engine and volplaning to free his hands, the pursuer recharged his magazine. Unfortunately it jammed, but he managed to insert four cartridges and to fire them at his descending opponent, who disappeared into a bank of cloud with dramatic suddenness. When the British officer emerged below the clouds he could see no sign of the other. He therefore climbed up to an altitude of some 7,000 feet, and came to the conclusion that the German must have come to earth in the French lines.

French airmen, too, have been very successful during the last three days, having dropped several bombs amongst some German cavalry and caused considerable loss and disorder, and having by similar means silenced a battery of field howitzers.

The German anti-aircraft guns have recently been unusually active. From their rate of fire they seem to be nearly automatic, but so far they have not had much effect in reducing the air reconnaissances carried out by us.

The general account of the position of the Aisne already given is incomplete without some description of the line actually held by our troops, though it must be at once obvious that the information on that subject which it is possible to publish is strictly limited. It is treading on less dangerous ground to depict the life led by our soldiers in the trenches. A striking feature of our line—to use the conventional term which so seldom expresses accurately the position taken up by an army—is that it consists really of a series of trenches not all placed alongside each other, but some more advanced than others and many facing in different directions. At one place they run east and west, along one side of a valley; at another almost north and south, up some subsidiary valley; here they line the edge of a wood and there they are on the reverse slope of a hill or possibly along a sunken road. And at different points both the German and British

trenches jut out like promontories into what might be regarded as the opponent's territory.

Though both sides have moved forward at certain points and withdrawn at others, no very important change has been effected in their dispositions, in spite of the enemy's repeated counter-attacks. These have been directed principally against one portion of the position won by us. But in spite of lavish expenditure of life they have not so far succeeded in driving us back.

The situation of the works in the German front line as a whole has been a matter of deliberate selection, for they have had the advantage of previous reconnaissance, being first in the field. Behind the front they now have several lines prepared for a step-by-step defence.

Another point which might cause astonishment to the visitor to our entrenchments is the evident indifference displayed to the provision of an extended field of frontal rifle fire—which is generally accepted as being one of the great requirements of a defensive position. It is still desirable if it can be obtained without the usually accompanying drawback of exposure to the direct fire of the hostile artillery. But experience has shown that a short field of fire is sufficient to beat back the infantry assaults of the enemy; and by giving up direct fire at long or medium ranges and placing our trenches on the reverse slope of a hill or behind the crest, it is in many places possible to gain shelter from the frontal fire of the German guns. For men well trained in musketry and under good fire-control dead ground beyond short range from their position has comparatively small terrors.

Many of the front trenches of the Germans equally lack a distant field of fire, but if lost they would be rendered untenable by us by the fact that they are exposed to fire from the German guns in rear and to a cross-rifle fire from neighbouring works. The extent to which cross-fire of all kinds is employed is also remarkable. Many localities and areas along the Aisne are not swept from the works directly in front of them, but are rendered untenable by rifle fire from neighbouring features or that of guns out of sight. So much is this the case that

amongst these hills and valleys it is a difficult matter for troops to find out whence they are being shot at. There is a perpetual triangular duel. A's infantry can see nothing to shoot at, but are under fire from B's guns. The action of B's guns then brings upon them the attention of some of A's artillery waiting for a target, the latter being in their turn assailed by other batteries; and so it goes on. In wooded country, in spite of aeroplanes and balloons, smokeless powder has made the localization and identification of targets a matter of supreme difficulty.

October 13, 1914

Our men have made themselves fairly comfortable in the trenches, in the numerous quarries cut out of the hillsides, and in the picturesque villages whose steep streets and red-tiled roofs climb the slopes and peep out amid the green and russet of the woods. In the firing line the men sleep and obtain shelter in the dug-outs they have hollowed or "undercut" in the sides of the trenches. These refuges are slightly raised above the bottom of the trench so as to remain dry in wet weather. The floor of the trench is also sloped for purposes of drainage. Some trenches are provided with head-cover and others with overhead cover, the latter, of course, giving protection from the weather as well as from shrapnel balls and splinters of shell.

Considerable ingenuity has been exercised in naming the shelters. Amongst other favourites are "The Hotel Cecil," "The Ritz," "Hotel Billet-doux," "Hotel Rue Dormir," etc. On the road barricades, also, are to be found boards bearing the notice—"This Way to the Prussians." Obstacles of every kind abound, and at night each side can hear the enemy driving in pickets for entanglements, digging *trous-de-loup*, or working forward by sapping. In some places the obstacles constructed by both sides are so close together that some wag has suggested that each should provide working parties to perform this fatiguing duty alternately, since their work is now almost indistinguishable and serves the same purpose.

The quarries and caves to which allusion has already

been made provide ample accommodation for whole battalions, and most comfortable are the shelters which have been constructed in them. The northern slopes of the Aisne Valley are fortunately very steep, and this to a great extent protects us from the enemy's shells, many of which pass harmlessly over our heads to burst in the meadows below along the river bank. At all points subject to shell-fire, access to the firing line from behind is provided by communication-trenches. These are now so good that it is possible to cross in safety the fire-swept zone to the advanced trenches from the billets in villages, the bivouacs in quarries, or the other places where the headquarters of units happen to be.

To those at home the life led by our men and by the inhabitants in this zone would seem strange indeed. All day, and often at night as well, the boom of the guns and the scream of the shells overhead continue. At times, especially in the middle of the day and after dark, the bombardment slackens; at others it swells into an incessant roar in which the reports of the different types of gun are merged into one great volume of sound. Now, there are short fierce bursts as a dozen heavy howitzer shells fall into a ploughed field, sending up clouds of black smoke and great clods of earth, or the white smoke-puffs of shrapnel suddenly open out and hang in clusters over a bridge, trench, or road. Then, perhaps, there is a period of quiescence, soon to be broken by a smaller howitzer shell which comes into a village and throws up a shower of dust, tiles, and stones.

And through this pandemonium the inhabitants go about their business as if they had lived within the sound of guns all their lives. A shell bursts in one street. In the next not a soul pays any attention or thinks of turning the corner to see what damage has been done. Those going to the trenches are warned to hurry across some point which the enemy have been shelling and which has already proved a death-trap for others. After running across it some mortification may be felt at the sight of an old woman pulling turnips in the very line of fire. Along certain stretches of road which are obviously "un-

healthy " the children continue to play in the gutter, or the old folks pass slowly trundling wheelbarrows. It may be fatalism, for not all these people can be deaf, nor can all be so stupid as not to realize how close they are to death.

It has already been mentioned that, according to information obtained from the enemy, 15 Germans were killed by a bomb dropped upon an ammunition wagon of a cavalry column. It was thought at the time that this might have been the work of one of our airmen, who reported that he had dropped a hand-grenade on a convoy, and had then got a bird's-eye view of the finest firework display that he had ever seen.

From the corroborative evidence of locality it now appears that this was the case, and that the grenade thrown by him must probably have been the cause of the destruction of a small convoy carrying field gun and howitzer ammunition, which has now been found, a total wreck, on a road passing through the Forêt de Retz, north-east of Villers Cotterets. Along the road lie 14 motor lorries, which are no more than skeletons of twisted iron, bolts, and odd fragments. Everything inflammable on the wagons has been burnt, as have the stripped trees—some with trunks split—on either side of the road. Of the drivers nothing now remains except some tattered boots and charred scraps of clothing, while the ground within a radius of 50 yards of the wagons is littered with pieces of iron, the split brass cases of cartridges which have exploded, and some fixed gun ammunition with live shell which has not done so.

It is possible to reconstruct the incident, if it was, in fact, brought about as supposed.

The grenade must have detonated on the leading lorry on one side of the road and caused the cartridges carried by it to explode. The three vehicles immediately in rear must then have been set on fire, with a similar result. Behind these are groups of four and two vehicles, so jammed together as to suggest that they must have collided in a desperate attempt to stop. On the other side of the road, almost level with the leading wagon, are four

more, which were probably fired by the explosion of the first. If this appalling destruction was due to one hand grenade, and there is a considerable amount of presumptive evidence to show that this was the case, it is an illustration of the potentialities of a small amount of high explosive detonated in the right spot, whilst the nature of the place where it occurred—a narrow forest road between high trees—is a testimony to the skill of the airman.

It is only fair to add that some of the French newspapers claim that this damage to the enemy was caused by the action of some of their Dragoons.

The whole district is gently undulating or quite flat except for a hill about 500 feet high, called Mont des Cats situated some eight miles north-east of Hazebrouck, from which radiate spurs like fingers from the palm of the hand it is the eminence upon which stands the town of Cassel. From anywhere save these few elevated points the view is much restricted by the hedges and frequent belts of trees. The communications are bad. The main roads, though straight, have a narrow strip of inferior *pavé* in the centre, while the by-roads are very winding.

It is in blind country of this nature that our advanced guards near the Belgian frontier are engaging the advanced troops of the enemy. The latter consist in some places of cavalry supported by Jäger and Schützen detachments with large numbers of machine guns, and in others of larger bodies of infantry. As was the case in our advance up to the Aisne, the enemy are making every effort to delay our progress, no doubt to give time for the stronger forces behind to perfect their arrangements. In general they take every advantage that is to be obtained from the ground and conceal themselves well, making use of ditches, hedges, and villages. They hold the buildings, many of which are placed in a state of defence, and in addition occupy narrow trenches with inconspicuous parapets outside the villages. The machine-guns are often placed in the centre of rooms, whence they can command an approach through a window.

So far in our advance we have inflicted considerable loss on these detachments, in spite of the fact that they retreat under cover of darkness whenever possible. But their resistance is by no means passive, and they have made several determined counter-attacks in order to free themselves and throw us back. Many of the prisoners taken show the greatest surprise at being opposed by the British in this quarter.

To the north of the Lys, although for the reasons already given adequate reconnaissance ahead has been practically impossible, and in spite of the fact that the Germans held a strong position on the high ridge between Godewaersvelde and Bailleul, one of our cavalry forces

would not be denied, and, supported by infantry, has driven the enemy back steadily. Some hard fighting has taken place in this direction, especially in the neighbourhood of Mont des Cats, where Prince Max of Hesse was mortally wounded on the 12th. He is buried in the grounds of the monastery which crowns the hill, together with three British officers and some German soldiers.

On the 13th a brilliant little exploit was performed by one of our cavalry patrols. Coming suddenly upon a German machine gun detachment, the subaltern in command at once gave the order to charge, with a result that some of the Germans were killed, the rest scattered, and the gun captured and carried off.

On the right, to the south of the Lys, progress has been slower, partly because the *terrain* affords greater facilities to the force acting on the defensive, partly because the enemy has had more time for preparation and is in greater strength. The numerous dykes in this low-lying part are so broad and deep as to necessitate the transport of planks and ladders by which to cross them. It is in this quarter that the most obstinate combats for the possession of villages have so far taken place, and that the enclosed country has rendered the co-operation of the artillery most difficult, except where the villages attacked contain a church or other landmark standing above the trees, by which the guns can get their range. Though the employment of our field artillery in battering down defended villages is thus hampered, another and very efficacious method of arriving at the same result has been evolved and is proving most effective.

Parts of the region where fighting has been in progress now present a melancholy aspect. Many of the once prosperous homesteads and hamlets are literally torn to pieces, the walls still standing pitted by shrapnel balls, and in some of the villages the churches are smouldering ruins. Dead horses, cows, and pigs which have been caught in the hail of shrapnel litter the village streets, and among the carcasses and débris wander the wretched inhabitants, who have returned to see what they can save from the wreckage. Here, blocking up a narrow side street,

is a dead horse still harnessed to a trap, and beside it is stretched the corpse of a Jäger; close by, in an enclosure where a shell has found them, lie some 30 cavalry horses; a little farther on is laid out a row of German dead, for whom graves are being dug by the peasants.

The work of burial falls to a great extent on the inhabitants, who, with our soldiers, take no little care in marking the last resting-places of their countrymen and their Allies, either by little wooden crosses or else by flowers. Amidst the graves scattered all over the countryside are the rifle-pits, trenches, and gun emplacements, which those now resting below the sod helped to defend or to attack. From these the progress of the fighting can be traced, and even its nature, for they vary from carefully constructed and cunningly placed works to the hastily shaped lair of a German sniper, or the roadside ditch, with its sides scooped out by the entrenching implements of our infantry.

October 17, 1914.

Notwithstanding the trying nature of the fighting in this quarter, and the wet weather, the troops are very fit, and the fact that we are steadily advancing and that the enemy is giving way before us has proved a most welcome and inspiring change for those who have been experiencing some weeks of monotony in trenches, where they had to endure continuous losses without the satisfaction of knowing for certain what losses were being inflicted upon the enemy except when he attacked. This is not the only advantage we possess over the Germans, for we still hear from prisoners that their advanced troops, at any rate, are short of food and exhausted by continual outpost work. We can afford to give our troops more rest, and there is no lack of good food.

Many of the troops opposed to us at present have only two months' service, and some of our prisoners state that these men will not expose themselves in the trenches. Nevertheless, the enemy in front are fighting well and skilfully, and are showing considerable powers of endurance. They generally contrive to remove the wounded

and often to bury their killed before they retire, their escape being facilitated by the numerous deep ditches.

Many of their cavalry patrols are wearing Belgian uniforms, a practice which is not excusable on the grounds of any lack of their own.

The inhabitants of one small town which has now been occupied by us state that a large force of German cavalry was recently billeted in the place, but that it retired hurriedly on the night of the 13th-14th, having some 600 wounded, of which 68 serious cases were left behind. The truth of the last part of the statement has been confirmed, for our troops found that number of men in a building over which an immense Red Cross flag was flying. As the British approached the town, smoke signals were being made from a tall chimney close to the building flying the flag. The Germans, consisting largely of Bavarian cavalry, who occupied this town for eight days, did not burn down the place, but they otherwise behaved in a way which merits the worst that has ever been said of them.

In spite of the adverse weather the aviators of both sides have not been idle in the northern theatre of operations. To begin with, on Monday, the 12th, a German airman flew over St. Omer and dropped five bombs onto it, apparently under the impression that the place was occupied by us. As a result two women and a little girl were killed. On Wednesday a hostile aeroplane was brought down by rifle and machine gun fire, and both observer and pilot were captured. The pilot was decorated with the Iron Cross, which, according to his own account, had been awarded to him as being the first German to drop a bomb on to Antwerp. On the 15th three of our aeroplanes gave chase to a German machine. Unluckily the one machine of ours which was faster than the enemy's met with some slight accident, and had to give up the chase.

A German airman recently made an unsuccessful attempt by means of four incendiary bombs to explode a French captive observation balloon. The missiles fell simultaneously on the circumference of a circle of about

50 yards diameter, and as they struck the ground emitted vivid red flames, followed by columns of dark smoke about 60 ft. high. At the point where each fell was found a large mass resembling dark pumice stone, and the stubble was burnt in patches of about a yard in diameter.

An incident which occurred during the 13th shows the resource and bravery of some of our enemy's scouts. The German artillery was retiring, and from time to time coming into action. An officer of one of our flank cavalry patrols had been standing for some minutes under a tree, when he noticed a fine wire hanging down close to the trunk.

Following the wire upwards with his eye, he was astonished to see one of the enemy in the tree. As he drew his revolver and fired the German dropped on to his head, also firing. The British officer was stunned, and when he came to it was to find himself alone, the peak of his cap blown away, and his uniform covered with blood, which was not his own.

As the campaign goes on the tendency of the Germans to rely on the splendid war material with which they have been so amply provided, rather than on the employment of masses of men, has become more and more marked. There are now indications, however, that their supply of material is not inexhaustible. The significant circular of the Prussian Minister of War enjoining the careful search of battlefields for equipment, and even the collection of empty cartridge cases, has been quoted in a previous letter. This circular seems to have been prompted more by necessity than by habits of economy, for in the recent fighting both gun and rifle ammunition of old patterns have been found in the trenches evacuated by the enemy, on the dead, and on prisoners.

Amongst the latter are Mauser cartridges similar to those used by the Boers in the South African War.

The following is a translation of a leaflet that German aviators have been dropping over the French lines:—

FRENCH SOLDIERS.

The Germans are only making war against the French Government, which is sacrificing you and your country to the

egotism of the English. Your commerce, your industry, and your agriculture will be ruined by this war, whilst the English alone will derive enormous profit from it.

You are pulling the chestnuts out of the fire for the English.

The news spread by your Government that the Russians are near Berlin is false. On the contrary, the Russians have been beaten in two great battles. One hundred and fifty thousand Russians have been captured and the rest have been driven in rout from German territory.

FRENCH SOLDIERS, SURRENDER !

So that this war which is ruining your country may be ended as soon as possible.

Rest assured that the prisoners and wounded are well treated by us.

In order to let you know the truth, the following testimonial from Surgeon-Major Dr. Sauve, of the French Army (Rue Luxembourg, Paris), is given:—

I, the undersigned, declare that I have seen that in the German hospitals at Somme and Aircourt the French wounded receive exactly the same treatment as the German. I may add that not only the French wounded but also their prisoners whom I saw were very well looked after.

The terms of this summons to surrender cannot be said to be tactful; and it has not had the desired effect. Apart from endeavours to influence the enemy, for others have probably been made, news of a sort is disseminated amongst the German soldiers by means of a special military newspaper called *The Patrol*, which is published in Berlin. Its historical value may be gauged by the statement made in its issue for September 6:—

It may be confidently asserted that the resistance of the active army of the French has been overcome. Reserve troops and new formations will no doubt give our heroic forces plenty to do as they advance further.

After some three weeks' further fighting, however, facts must have convinced the German troops that this assertion was not justified. In a captured letter, dated September 27, for instance, the following passage occurs:—

We are very anxious about the result of the fighting. We have nothing but reports of great successes, but don't now put much faith in them. To-day we got some papers of the 1st to 5th September, and it is really painful to read the boastful announcements of the march on Paris, for we are no nearer to Paris now than we were then. I don't know whether you realize this, but there is no use in trying to hide it.

Information recently received corroborates the impression already gained that the enemy's troops suffered severe privations during August and September. From the many letters which bear this out some extracts are given:—

September 22. . . . My best pals are killed or wounded. One company has dwindled to two-thirds of its original strength. We want peace quickly. We have been driven to exhaustion and have marched for entire weeks, even through the nights. We have not had bread every day, have not washed for a fortnight, nor shaved since the commencement of the war. But all this is nothing, and we shall soon be home, for it will all soon be over. We have just been under the enemy's artillery fire for eight days.

We get no letters. We have passed thousands of full mail bags on the road, but there are no officers to deal out the letters.

After a 36 hours' march without halting we arrived just in time for the fight. For three days we did not have a hot meal because our field kitchens went astray. We had a hot meal yesterday evening. We are all ready to drop, but must march on.

There is no doubt that the Germans have to a great extent recovered from the conditions implied by the above letters. But their forces are by no means what they were.

October 2, 1914.

Before bringing the narrative of events in the northern area up to date, it will be as well to recapitulate on broad lines, with the addition of certain new matter now available, the general course of operations up to the night of October 16.

When the arrival of reinforcements enabled British troops to assist in the extension northwards of the Allies' line, the enemy in this area had advanced from the north-east and east and was holding a front extending from the high ground about Mont des Cats through Meteren to Estaires, on the River Lys, with advanced bodies of cavalry and other troops thrown out some distance in front. South of the Lys his line was continued due south from Estaires through very intricate country for about three miles, when it turned slightly to the south-east, passing about three miles east of Béthune to Vermelles.

The Allies encountered some resistance on the 12th from the enemy's advanced troops, and on the 13th there was fighting all along the line between our advanced guards and those of the Germans, who at some points made determined counter-attacks. As a result, however, of two minor engagements at Mont des Cats and Meteren on the 13th the enemy's right fell back in considerable haste, making use of the darkness to evade pursuit. Bailleul, which had been occupied for eight days, was abandoned without a shot being fired.

On the 14th the advance was continued by our left wing, the enemy being driven back so far that the rest of his line became endangered—as we have since learnt from the captured operation orders of the 6th Bavarian Cavalry Division. These state that, the right of the line having been forced to withdraw, the left was compelled to conform to the movement. The latter withdrawal left us by the night of the 15th in possession of all the country on the left bank of the Lys to a point some five miles below Armentières, and of all the bridges above Armentières. On the 16th the enemy retired from that town after a few shells had been fired at the barricade on the Nieppe bridge, and the river line to within a short distance of Frelinghien fell into our hands. At Armentières the enemy left behind 50 wounded, some rifles and ammunition, and a motor-car.

The state in which the crossings of the Lys were found indicates that no organized scheme of defence of the river line had been executed, even if it had been intended.

Thus, to take six adjacent points, at Warneton the bridge had been destroyed and was being repaired by the Germans. That at Frelinghien had not been demolished and was strongly defended. At Houplines the bridge was destroyed; but at Nieppe the important road bridge connecting with Armentières and the railway bridge next to it were merely barricaded and not even prepared for demolition; while, strange to say, the bridge at Erquinghem was neither defended nor broken.

The River Lys, which plays a prominent part in the operations, here flows through a depression so broad and shallow as to be practically a plain. It is from 45 feet to 75 feet wide, but only 6 feet deep. The navigation of its natural course is much obstructed by sandbanks, and it has been canalized in some parts, its value as a military obstacle being thereby much increased. To permit the passage of barges many of the bridges are of the draw or swing type and can be easily demolished, but the gaps are not large and can be bridged easily.

To return to the narrative. Our right wing, south of the Lys, was for the reasons already given able to make little progress until the 15th. The resistance offered to its advance was of a most determined character, and the fighting resolved itself into a series of fiercely-contested encounters. In the attack on some villages all the efforts of the infantry were unavailing until our howitzers had reduced the houses to ruins; other villages would be taken and retaken three times before they were finally secured. On this front the French cavalry gave our infantry most welcome support, and by the night of the 16th resistance had been overcome, and the enemy had fallen back some five miles to the eastward.

An incident of the fighting on this night is worth recording. An important crossing over the Lys at Warneton was strongly held by the Germans, who at the entrance to the town had constructed a high barricade loopholed at the bottom so that men could fire through it from a lying position. This formidable obstacle was encountered by a squadron of our cavalry. Nothing daunted, they obtained help from the artillery, who man-

handled a gun into position, and blew the barricade to pieces, scattering the defenders.

They then advanced some three-quarters of a mile into the centre of the town, where they found themselves in a large *place*. They had hardly reached the farther end when one of the buildings suddenly appeared to leap skywards in a sheet of flame, a shower of star shells at the same time making the place as light as day, and enabling the enemy—who were ensconced in the surrounding houses—to pour in a devastating fire from rifles and machine guns. Our cavalry managed to extricate themselves from this trap with a loss of only one officer—the squadron leader—wounded and nine men killed and wounded; but, determining that none of their number should fall into the enemy's hands, a party of volunteers went back, and, taking off their boots in order to make no noise on the pavement, re-entered the inferno they had just left, and succeeded in carrying off their wounded comrades.

During Saturday, the 17th, Sunday, the 18th, and Monday, the 19th, our right encountered strong opposition about La Bassée from the enemy, who was established behind embankments and spoil-heaps, and well provided with machine guns. Advance was slow on account of the difficulty of reconnaissance. In the centre and on the left better progress was made, although the Germans were everywhere entrenched and still continued to hold some of the villages on the Lys in spite of bombardment. At the close of each of these days a night counter-stroke was delivered against one or other part of our line, but all were repulsed without difficulty.

On Tuesday, the 20th, a determined but unsuccessful attack was made against practically the whole of our line. At one point, where one of our brigades made a counter-attack, 1,100 German dead were found in a trench and 40 prisoners were taken. Among the prisoners captured this day by the Belgians was a hunchback, who expressed his gratitude and relief at being a prisoner. He had had no training before August 19 last, and said

that many men of his regiment were between 17 and 18 years of age.

The following letter found on a German gives an interesting appreciation of 'the present situation from the enemy's point of view:—

PERENCHIES, NEAR LILLE,
October 16, 1914.

DEAR BROTHER,

Taking the opportunity of a five hours' pause, which is the first chance of writing I have had, I hasten to inform you of my present position. On the 5th October came the order that the XIXth Corps should leave the Third Army and form part of the First Army under General Kluck. The march from St. Hillegries to Lille, 180 kilometres (108 miles) in five days was very exhausting. In Lille hostile infantry was reported, and we were engaged in street and house fighting on the 13th and 14th, and it was only by the 19th Heavy Artillery that the town was compelled to surrender. Lille has already been taken by us three times, and if troops or supply columns are attacked again the place will be razed to the ground. The shell-fire, although it only lasted an hour, has cost the town at least a hundred buildings. Here, also, in Lille the 77th Field Artillery has many of our comrades on its conscience.

Of prisoners we have absolutely none at present, since the wretches put on civilian clothes, and then one can look in vain for soldiers. We lie five miles from Lille and are to hold up the English who have landed. This will be no light task, since we are not fully informed as to their strength. It gives one the impression that the war will last a long time. Well, I shall hold out even if it goes on for another year. In front of us we can hear heavy guns, so we may easily have more fighting to-day. We have had no post for 14 days, for the country here is very unsafe.

Although the enemy as a rule contrives to remove his wounded, there have been signs in many of the villages of a hurried retirement. In one a great quantity of lances and ammunition was abandoned, in another so hasty was the retreat that the staff left behind their dinner, operation orders, and a number of photographs of the campaign, which they were evidently examining when they were alarmed.

The advance has been much hindered not only by the weather and by the nature of the country, but by the impossibility of forecasting the reception that our advanced troops are likely to meet with on approaching a village or town. One place may be hastily evacuated as untenable, while another in the same general line may continue to resist all efforts for a considerable time. The feelings of our cyclists may be imagined when on cautiously approaching a town, suspecting an ambush at every turn, they are met by a throng of citizens of both sexes who kiss them effusively. Unfortunately this experience is rather the exception than the rule. At the next village the roads will in all probability have trenches cut in them and be blocked by barricades defended by machine guns. Another, perhaps, can only be taken after an action of all arms.

Under such circumstances an incautious advance is severely punished, and it is impossible for large bodies of troops to push on until the front has been thoroughly reconnoitred. This work requires the highest qualities from the cavalry, cyclists, and advanced guards, for it cannot be carried out merely by obtaining a view of the enemy, which is often impossible, but must be effected by drawing his fire and compelling him to disclose his dispositions.

Among other incidents of the fighting which serve to illustrate the resource and initiative of our rank and file may be mentioned the following:—

On the 15th an infantry patrol which was digging an advanced trench at night, hearing some of the enemy's cavalry approaching, lay in wait for them, killing four and capturing five without suffering any casualties themselves. On the 16th the crew of one of our armoured motor-cars obtained information that a party of hostile cavalry was in a farm. They enlisted help from 10 men of the nearest battalion, who stationed themselves on one side of the farm while the motor-car waited on the other. Being unable to bolt their quarry, our men carried fire to the farm, which had the desired effect, and resulted in two Uhlans being killed and eight cap

tured, no casualties being sustained by the attacking party.

Armoured motor-cars, equipped with machine guns are now playing a part in the war, and have been most successful in dealing with the small parties of German mounted troops. In their employment our gallant Allies the Belgians, who are now fighting with us and acquitting themselves nobly, have shown themselves to be experts. They appear to regard Uhlan-hunting as a form of sport. The crews display the utmost dash and skill in this form of warfare, often going out several miles ahead of their own advanced troops and seldom failing to return loaded with spoils in the shape of Lancer caps, busbies, helmets, lances, rifles, and other trophies, which they distribute as souvenirs to the crowds in the market-places of the frontier towns.

An easy capture was recently effected by an Engineer telegraph lineman. Returning in the dark after repairing some air lines which had been cut by shell fire, he was passing through a wood when his horse shied at some figures crouching in a ditch. He called out, "Come out of it," whereupon, to his surprise, three German cavalrymen emerged and surrendered. He marched them back to his headquarters.

Although the struggle in the northern area naturally attracts more attention, that on the Aisne still continues, though there is no alteration in the general situation. The enemy has made certain changes in the positions of his heavy artillery, with the result that one or two places which were formerly safe quarters are now subject to bombardment, while others which were only approachable at night or by crawling on hands and knees now serve as recreation-grounds. At one point even a marquee has been erected.

A story from this quarter illustrates a new use for the craters of the "Black Mairias." An officer on patrol stumbled in the dark on to a German trench. He turned and made for the British lines, but the fire was so heavy that he had to throw himself on the ground and crawl. There was, however, no cover, and his chances were

The following extract from a captured copy of the orders of the German XIVth Reserve Corps, dated October 7, suggests some deterioration in the *general* discipline of one corps of the enemy, as well as shortage of supplies:—

It is notified that the troops must no longer count on the regular arrival of supplies. They must, therefore, utilize the resources of the country as much and as carefully as possible.

The regulations for the use of the iron rations must be strictly observed.

* * * * *

In spite of all precautions complaints are continually being received that supply and ammunition columns constantly fail to arrive because they are stopped and unloaded by unauthorized persons. It is again notified that only the authorities to whom the supplies, etc., are consigned have the right to take delivery of them.

Official casualty lists of recent date which have been captured show that the losses of the Germans continue to be heavy. One infantry company in a single list reports 139 killed and wounded, or more than half its war establishment. Other companies have suffered almost as heavily. It further appears that the number of men reported 'missing'—that is, those who have fallen into the hands of the enemy or have become marauders—is much greater in *Ersatz* battalions than in first line units. This is evidence of the inferior quality of some of the reserves which are now being brought up to reinforce the enemy's field army, and is all the more encouraging since every day adds to our first line strength. The arrival of the Indian contingents has caused every one to realize that while the enemy is filling his depleted ranks with immature levies we have large reserves of perfectly fresh and thoroughly trained troops to draw upon

V

THE BATTLE OF YPRES

October 26, 1914.

Before the narrative of the progress of the fighting near the Franco-Belgian frontier subsequent to October 20 is continued, a brief description will be given of the movement of a certain fraction of our troops from its former line facing north, on the east of Paris, to its present position facing east, in the north-west corner of France, by which a portion of the British Army has been enabled to join hands with the incoming and growing stream of reinforcements. This is now an accomplished fact, as is generally known, and can therefore be explained in some detail without detriment. Mention will also be made of the gradual development up to October 20 in the nature of the operations in this quarter of the theatre of war, which has recently come into such prominence.

In its broad lines the transfer of strength by one combatant during the course of a great battle, which has just been accomplished, is somewhat remarkable. It can best be compared with the action of the Japanese during the battle of Mukden, when General Oku withdrew a portion of his force from his front, moved it northwards behind the line, and threw it into the fight again near the extreme left of the Japanese armies. In general direction, though not in scope or possible results, owing to the coast line being reached by the Allies, the parallel is complete. The Japanese force concerned, however, was much smaller than ours, and the distance covered by it was less than that from the Aisne to the Franco-Belgian frontier. General Oku's troops, moreover, marched, whereas ours were moved by march, rail, and motor.

What was implied in the actual withdrawal from contact with the enemy along the Aisne will be appreciated when the conditions under which we were then situated are recalled. In places the two lines were not 100 yards apart, and for us no movement was possible during daylight. In some of the trenches which were under enfilade fire our men had to sit all day long close under the traverses—as are called those mounds of earth which stretch like partitions at intervals across a trench, so as to give protection from lateral fire. Even where there was cover, such as that afforded by depressions or sunken roads, on the hill-side below and behind our firing line any attempt to cross the intervening space was met by fierce bursts of machine gun and shell fire. The men in the firing line were on duty for 24 hours at a time, and brought rations and water with them when they came on duty, for none could be sent up to them during the day. Even the wounded could not be removed until dark.

The preliminary retirement of the units was therefore carried out gradually under cover of darkness. That the Germans only once opened fire upon them whilst so engaged was due to the care with which the operation was conducted, and also, probably, to the fact that the enemy were so accustomed to the recurrence of the sounds made by the reliefs of the men in the firing line and by the movement of the supply trains below that they were misled as to what was actually taking place. What the operation amounted to on our part was the evacuation of the trenches, under carefully made arrangements with the French, who had to take our place in the trenches, the retirement to the river below—in many cases down a steep slope—the crossing of the river over the noisy plank roadways of floating or repaired bridges—which were mostly commanded by the enemy's guns—and the climb up to the top of the plateau on the south side. The rest of the move was a complicated feat of transportation, which cut across some of the lines of communication of our Allies; but it requires no description here. In spite of the various difficulties the whole strategic

operation of transferring the large number of troops from the Aisne was carried out without loss and practically without a hitch.

As regards the change in the nature of the fighting in which we have recently been engaged, it has already been pointed out that the operations had up till then been of a preparatory nature and that the Germans were obviously seeking to delay us by advanced troops whilst heavier forces were being got ready and brought up to the scene of action. It was known that they were raising a new army consisting of corps formed of *Ersatz*, volunteers, and other material which had not yet been drawn upon, and that part of it would in all probability be sent to the western theatre, either to cover the troops laying siege to Antwerp, in case that place should hold out, or, in the event of the capture of the fortress, to act in conjunction with the besieging force in a violent offensive movement towards the coast.

After the fall of Antwerp and the release of the besieging troops there was a gradual increase in the strength of the opposition met with by us. The resistance of the detachments—which beyond the right extreme of the German fortified line near Bethune a fortnight ago consisted almost entirely of cavalry—grew more and more determined, as more infantry and guns came up into the front line, until Tuesday, October 20, when the arrival opposite us of a large portion of the new formations and a considerable number of heavy guns enabled the enemy to assume the offensive practically against the whole of our line, at the same time that they attacked the Belgians between us and the coast. The operations then really assumed a fresh complexion.

Since that date up to the 25th, apart from the operations on either side of us, there has been plenty of action to chronicle on our immediate front, where some of the heaviest fighting in which we have yet been engaged has taken place, resulting in immense loss to the Germans. On Wednesday, the 21st, the new German formations again pressed forward in force vigorously all along our line. On our right, south of the Lys, an attack on

Violaines was repulsed with loss to the assailants. On the other hand, we were driven from some ground close by, to the north, but regained it by a counter-attack. Still farther north the Germans gained and retained some points. Their total casualties to the south-east of Armentières are estimated at over 6,000.

On the north of the Lys, in our centre, a fiercely contested action took place near La Gheir, which village was captured in the morning by the enemy and then retaken by us. In this direction the German casualties were also extremely heavy. They came on with the greatest bravery, in swarms, only to be swept away by our fire. One battalion of their 104th Regiment was practically wiped out, some 400 dead being picked up by us in our lines alone. Incidentally, by our counter-attack, we took 130 prisoners, and released some 40 of our own men who had been surrounded and captured, including a subaltern of artillery, who had been cut off while observing from a point of vantage. It is agreeable to record that our men were very well treated by their captors, who were Saxons, being placed in cellars for protection from the bombardment of our own guns.

On our left our troops advanced against the German XXVIth Reserve Corps near Passchendaele and were met by a determined counter-offensive, which was driven back with great loss. At night the Germans renewed their efforts unsuccessfully in this quarter. At one point they tried a ruse which is no longer new. As they came up in a solid line two deep they shouted out, "Don't fire; we are the Coldstream Guards." But our men are getting used to tricks of this kind, and the only result of this "slimness" was that they allowed the enemy's infantry to approach quite close before they swept them down with magazine fire. Apart from the 400 dead found near our lines in our centre our patrols afterwards discovered some 300 dead farther out in front of our left, killed by our artillery.

Thursday, the 22nd, saw a renewal of the pressure against us. We succeeded, however, in holding our ground in nearly every quarter. South of the Lys the

enemy attacked from La Bassée and gained Violaines and another point, but their effort against a third village was repulsed by artillery fire alone, the French and British guns working together very effectively. On the north of the river it was a day of minor attacks against us, which were all beaten back.

The Germans advanced in the evening against our centre and left, and were again hurled back, though they gained some of our trenches in the latter quarter. By this time the enemy had succeeded in bringing up several heavy howitzers, and our casualties were considerable.

On Friday, the 23rd, all action south of the Lys on our right was confined to that of the artillery, several of the hostile batteries being silenced by our fire. In the centre their infantry again endeavoured to force their way forward and were only repulsed after determined fighting, leaving many dead on the ground and several prisoners in our hands. North of the Lys attacks at different points were repulsed.

On our left the 23rd was a bad day for the Germans. Advancing in our turn, we drove them from some of the trenches out of which they had turned us on the previous evening, captured 150 prisoners, and released some of our men whom they had taken. As the Germans retreated our guns did great execution amongst them. They afterwards made five desperate assaults on our trenches, advancing in mass and singing "Die Wacht am Rhein" as they came on. Each assault was easily beaten back, our troops waiting until the enemy came to very close range before they opened fire with rifles and maxims, causing terrible havoc in the solid masses.

During the fighting in this quarter on the night of the 22nd and on the 23rd the German losses were again extremely heavy. We made over 600 prisoners during that time, and picked up 1,500 dead, killed on the latter day alone. Much of the slaughter was due to the point-blank magazine fire of our men against the German assaults, whilst our field guns and howitzers, working in perfect combination, did their share when the enemy were repulsed. As they fell back they were subjected

to a shower of shrapnel. When they sought shelter in villages or buildings they were shattered and driven out by high-explosive shell and then again caught by shrapnel as they came into the open. The troops to suffer so severely were mostly of the XXIIIrd Corps—one of their new formations. Certainly the way their advance was conducted showed a lack of training and faults in leading which the almost superhuman bravery of the soldiers could not counterbalance. It was a holocaust. The spectacle of these devoted men chanting a national song as they marched on to certain death was inspiring. It was at the same time pitiable. And if any proof were needed that untrained valour alone cannot gain the day in modern war, the advance of the XXIIIrd German Corps on October 23rd most assuredly furnished it. Besides doing its share of execution on the hostile infantry, our artillery in this quarter brought down a German captive balloon. As some gauge of the rate at which the guns were firing at what was for them an ideal target it may be mentioned that one field battery expended 1,800 rounds of ammunition during the day.

On Saturday, the 24th, action on our right was once more confined to that of artillery, except at night, when the Germans pressed on, only to be repulsed. In the centre, near Armentières, our troops withstood three separate attempts of the enemy to push forward, our guns coming into play with good effect. Against our left the German XXVIIIth Corps made a violent effort, with no success. On Sunday, the 25th, it was our turn to take the offensive. This was carried out by a portion of our left wing, which advanced, gained some ground, and took two guns and 80 prisoners. It is believed that six machine-guns fell to the French. In the centre the fighting was severe, though generally indecisive in result, and the troops in some places were engaged in hand-to-hand combat. Towards evening we captured 200 prisoners. On the right action was again confined to that of the guns.

Up to the night of the 25th, therefore, not only have we maintained our position against the great effort on

the part of the enemy to break through to the west, or to force us back, which started on the 20th; we have on our left passed to the offensive. These six days, as may be gathered, have been spent by us in repelling a succession of desperate onslaughts. It is true that the efforts against us have been made to a great extent by partially trained men, some of whom appear to be suffering from lack of food. But it must not be forgotten that these troops, which are in great force, have only recently been brought into the field, and are therefore comparatively fresh. They are fighting also with the utmost determination, in spite of the fact that many of them are heartily sick of the war.

The struggle has been of the most severe and sanguinary nature, and it seems that success will favour that side which is possessed of most endurance or can bring up and fling fresh forces into the fray. Though we have undoubtedly inflicted immense loss upon the enemy, they have so far been able to fill up the gaps in their ranks and to return to the charge, and we have suffered heavily ourselves.

One feature of the tactics now employed has been the use of cavalry in dismounted action, for on both sides many of the mounted troops are fighting in the trenches alongside the infantry. Armoured motor-cars armed with maxims and light quick-firing guns have also recently played a useful part on our side, especially in helping to eject the enemy lurking in villages and isolated buildings. Against such parties the combined action of the quick-firer against the snipers in buildings and the maxim against them when they are driven into the open is most efficacious.

November 1, 1914.

In spite of the great losses which they suffered in their attacks last week, the Germans have continued their offensive towards the west almost continuously during the five days from October 26 to 30. Opposite us it has gradually grown in intensity and extent of application as more men and guns have been brought up and

pushed into the fight, and it has developed into the most bitterly contested battle which has been fought in the western theatre of war.

The German artillery has to a large extent been increased by that transferred from round Antwerp. As regards infantry, it is possible that some of the additional troops now appearing on our front have been rendered available by the relaxation of the pressure against our Allies to the north of Ypres caused by the desperate and successful resistance made by the latter, by the harassing nature of the artillery fire brought to bear by our ships against the strip of country along the coast, and by the flooding of an area along the river Yser. Forces have been massed also from the south, whilst another of the new army corps has definitely made its *début* before us. And though the attempts to hack, or rather to blast and hack, a way through us have been made in other directions, they have for the last few days been most seriously concentrated upon the neighbourhood of Ypres.

Whether the motive inspiring the present action of the Germans against that place is an ambition to win through to the port of Calais—as is to be gathered from articles in their newspapers—or whether the operation is due to a desire to drive the Allied forces out of the whole of Belgium, in order to complete the conquest of that country with a view to its annexation and to gain prestige with neutrals, is immaterial. What concerns us more closely is that they have been making and are still pressing a desperate attempt to gain the town.

On Monday, the 26th, south of the Lys, on our right, the enemy attacked Neuve Chapelle—one of the villages held by us—in the evening, advancing under cover of a wood. They managed to gain possession of a portion of it. North of the Lys, in the centre, bombardment alone was kept up, and some ground was made by us. A detached post which was attacked in force during the night drove back its assailants, who left 56 dead behind. Near our left the Germans developed a very strong attack on a section of our line to the east of Ypres. Though supported by a great mass of artillery this was checked. But

it had two results. One was that our position was re-adjusted. The other was that our extreme left alone advanced in conjunction with some of our Allies.

On Tuesday, the 27th, the Germans rather focussed their principal attention on our right centre and right, and most desperate fighting took place for the possession of Neuve Chapelle. In spite of repeated counter-attacks by our troops the enemy during the day managed to hold on to the northern part of the village, which he had gained the day before. Towards evening we had gradually regained the great part of the place by step-by-step fighting when fresh hostile reinforcements were brought up and the entire village was captured by the enemy. They made several assaults against our whole front south of the Lys, but with the exception of their success at Neuve Chapelle won no advantage.

The combat for that place, as is usually the case with village fighting, was of the most murderous description, while it is believed that the enemy's losses in this quarter of the field generally were very great. An artillery officer who was observing their advance reports that the effects of our rifle and gun fire were stupendous, and that the Germans had to throw the corpses of their own men out of their trenches as they came on, in order to obtain cover. Four successive attacks were made, each by a different regiment, and in this way the whole of one division was engaged piecemeal in about the same locality. The last of these regiments has now been practically disposed of and according to prisoners their condition is deplorable.

North of the river our centre was subjected to heavy shell fire from pieces of various sizes. Our guns were by no means idle, and one of our patrols found 11 Germans dead and one rendered unconscious by fumes in a farm in which they had observed one of our lyddite shells detonate. Towards our left the readjustment of our line, commenced on Monday, was completed and some redistribution of strength was effected. On the extreme left ground was gained.

Neuve Chapelle was again the scene of desperate fighting on Wednesday, the 28th, some of our Indian troops

greatly distinguishing themselves by a well-conducted counter-attack, by which they drove the Germans out of the greater part of the place with the bayonet. On emerging from the village, however, they were exposed to the concentrated fire of machine guns and had to remain contented with what they had gained. Farther on the left, during the morning, the enemy made attacks under cover of the usual heavy bombardment, but each effort was repulsed with great slaughter. One of our trenches was carried and then recovered after a loss of 200 dead had been inflicted on the enemy. On our centre, north of the Lys, nothing of particular moment occurred. On the extreme left our advance was not pressed, and the enemy remained in possession of Beceleere. A night attack by them was repulsed.

Next day the centres of pressure were for the most part our two flanks. South of the Lys, against our right, the Germans delivered an assault which failed. In front of one battalion they are estimated to have left between 600 and 700 dead, whilst not far off a trench into which they had penetrated was recaptured by us at an expense to them of 70 killed and 14 prisoners.

In the centre little took place worthy of special record. A few Germans came in and surrendered voluntarily; and in this quarter we experienced for the first time in the northern theatre of war the action of the *Minenwerfer*, or trench mortar. It has a range of some 500 or 600 yards and throws a bomb loaded with high explosive weighing up to 200 lb., being fired at extreme elevation from the bottom of a pit in the trench. About midnight our line was attacked in two places. One of these efforts did not mature, as the ground over which the German infantry had to advance was well swept by our guns. In the other case the assault was carried out against one of our brigades by a force of some 12 battalions. With great self-restraint our men held their fire for 40 minutes until the attackers got quite close, and then drove them back with a loss of 200 killed. The enemy penetrated into a portion of one of our trenches, but were driven out again, losing 80 men killed and captured.

The really important feature in this day's operations occurred north of the Lys and consisted of an onslaught in great force made in the morning in the direction of Ypres. After a heavy cannonade the assault was driven home and a portion of our front line was forced back. By evening the lost ground was recovered and in some places more than recovered, with the exception of one part to which the enemy clung. Our losses were heavy, but not so severe as those of the enemy, who at one spot suffered enormously from the concentrated fire of our massed machine guns.

November 1, 1914.

Friday, the 30th, witnessed a renewal of the efforts against our right, but without success to the enemy. In the centre the bombardment was heavy. Indeed, so many shells fell round our positions that the telephone wires were frequently cut. The attack in the direction of Ypres generally was renewed. South-east of that town it was pressed in great force, and in places our line was again forced back a short distance; but on our left the on-coming Germans were stopped by our entanglements under close rifle fire, and after two efforts to advance gave way.

On Saturday, the 31st, a most determined attack was made upon our left and left centre, the pressure being specially severe against the latter portion of our position. Part of our line was driven back temporarily by sheer weight of metal and numbers, but was almost all recovered again before night. Against our centre the enemy did not advance, whilst against our right they were not nearly so active as farther north.

So far, with the assistance of the French, who have been co-operating most effectually, we have succeeded in maintaining our line and in retaining possession of Ypres, upon the capture of which by the end of October the Germans had set their heart. As may have been gathered, the fighting of the past five days has been of the most desperate nature. It has been eminently a soldiers' battle; and without exaggeration or any undue self-con-

gratulation it can be said that our men have behaved splendidly. In the face of heavy odds and against the repeated onslaughts of great masses continually replaced by fresh men and backed by the almost continuous fire of an immense concentration of guns they have by their dogged resistance well upheld the reputation of our army. Heavy as have been our losses, we have taken a far heavier toll from the enemy, and have prevented them gaining the object upon which all their energies have been concentrated. And not only our troops have maintained their traditions. Our French Allies have been fighting with all the dash for which they are famous, and from all accounts at Dixmude and along the Yser they have made a name for themselves which will never die. The Belgian Army has likewise resisted the furious onslaughts of the enemy with the utmost gallantry.

The German troops, also, have won our respect for the way in which they have advanced. Whether it is due to patriotism or the fear induced by an iron discipline, the fact remains that they have steadily pressed on to what in many cases must obviously have been certain death. That they are sometimes forced to go on is shown by the following answer to an interrogation put to a wounded prisoner:—

“I belong to the—Company of the —th Regiment of Infantry, of the — Division of the —th Corps. I was embodied in October, 1913. On mobilization the weakly and those backward in training, to the number of about 60 per company, were withdrawn from the Active Regiment to form the nucleus of a Reserve Regiment, which was completed by Badenese and Württembergers belonging to the 2nd Ban of the Landwehr. We received new ‘field grey’ uniform.

After 10 weeks of hard training we travelled for 3 days and 2 nights from Thuringia up to Achiet (?), where we remained in reserve. We were told that our nearest enemies were the English.

On the 17th October and the next day we performed such fatiguing forced marches that many men fell out on the road. On the 19th we each received 285 rounds of ammunition and had our first taste of fire. Although we were told that there

were only *franc-tireurs* in front of us, I saw French cavalrymen and no other foes.

From this day onward the battle was uninterrupted. Or the 20th my section received orders to go forward to the attack, and the officers warned us that if we gave way fire would be opened upon us from behind. This threat was carried into effect when the losses we suffered compelled us to retire. Indeed, it was by a German bullet that I was wounded.

Having fallen on the ground, I remained between the lines without food or care for 2 days, at the end of which time I dragged myself to a ruined house.

During the whole of this time the German shells, which were short, were falling about my shelter, some hundreds of paces from the French lines. These having advanced on the 24th, I myself moved forward, called out to a passing patrol, and surrendered.

We have received no distribution of food since our arrival in France.

The 'Commandant' of my company was the Reserve Lieutenant —, 28 years of age. The Colonel, whose name I don't know, also belonged to the Reserve, as did all the other officers of the Regiment.

The officers told us that if we fell into the hands of the French we should be sent to the Foreign Legion and certainly should be massacred by the Moroccans.

I only saw one man shot. He was a priest who, they said, was a spy."

The results of the inundation to the north of Dixmude have been observed by our aviators, who have seen numbers of the enemy collected in groups on the dykes which intersect the flooded area where, according to report, some of the German heavy artillery is bogged. Our airmen have also been able to harass advancing hostile columns by bomb dropping and machine-gun fire. The tactical transfer of troops behind the German front line is now carried out to a great extent by motor omnibuses, of which long strings are visible from above.

During the past few days large numbers of refugees have been streaming back along all the roads from Belgium, and crowding the empty trains returning from

the front, upon which the French have most humanely allowed them to travel. In these whole families may be seen jostled together in horse-trucks, together with what few household goods they have been able to carry away; but the less fortunate have to trudge the roads, making use of any shelter they can find. The inhabitants of the district within our zone of operations, also, line the roads from morning to night and listen to the sound of the guns, there being nothing else for them to do. As the dull roar waxes or wanes so does confidence die away or return; and in such alternations of fear and hope is each weary day passed. All this traffic to and fro of civilians entails the utmost vigilance in order to guard against espionage.

November 4, 1914.

Before the chronological record of the course of events is resumed a short description will be given of the part in the battle played on Saturday, October 31, by the 14th (County of London) Battalion the London Regiment, or, as it is far better known, "The London Scottish." Reference has already been made to its action, and the Commander in-Chief's message to the officer commanding has been quoted, but no details of what happened have been given.

The occasion is not looked upon as a special one because this battalion acquitted itself well, for that was regarded as a matter of course, nor because it has done better than the Regular battalions, who have been doing as much, if not more, for weeks on end. It is a special event because it forms an epoch in the military history of the British Empire, and marks the first time that a complete unit of our Territorial Army has been thrown into the fight alongside its sister units of the Regulars. Briefly what happened was this:—

On Saturday, being ordered to take up a section of the firing line to support some of our cavalry, and having advanced to its position under heavy fire from field guns, howitzers, and machine guns, the battalion reached a point where further movement forward was impossible. There it maintained itself till dusk, when it proceeded to entrench.

From 9 that night till 2 a.m. on Sunday the Germans made numerous attacks on the Scottish line, all of which were repulsed by rifle fire.

At 2 a.m. they made their great effort and assaulted the front and left of the position in great force. A considerable number succeeded by a *détour* in getting round the flank of the regiment. A large proportion of these were engaged by the companies in support and reserve, while others penetrated between the first and second lines of trenches and assailed our firing line in the rear. While fighting with rifle and bayonet was going on both in front and immediately behind the firing line the reserve company still farther behind made repeated bayonet charges against the enemy who had got round, and so prevented an entire envelopment of the battalion. Behind the firing line the scene of combat was lit up by a blazing house which the Germans had set alight.

At dawn it was discovered that large numbers of the enemy had, according to custom, worked round both flanks with machine guns, and a retirement was carried out. This was effected under a cross-fire from machine guns and rifles. Naturally in an encounter of this nature the battalion suffered heavy loss; but though unable to maintain its position it acquitted itself with gallantry and coolness in a situation of peculiar difficulty, and, following the national motto of *Nemo me impune lacessit*, inflicted far more damage on the enemy than it received.

To turn to the general narrative. On Sunday, November 1, the full violence of the enemy's attack again fell on our left, their main efforts being still directed slightly south of Ypres. Such was the force of the onslaught and the weight of artillery supporting it that our line was temporarily driven back. It was soon readjusted, however, and by evening the situation in this quarter was the same as it had been 24 hours earlier. That night some shells were thrown into Ypres itself.

Farther to the south the Germans had during the previous night retaken the village of Messines and had also captured Wytschaete. By 11 a.m. our cavalry, working in co-operation with the French, drove them out

of the latter place by a brilliant bayonet charge; but we did not occupy it. A few of the prisoners taken at this place were only 17 years of age, and said that they had had practically no training and little food; some had never fired a rifle before.

The fact that Messines still remained in hostile hands necessitated a slight adjustment of our front in the centre, but apart from this there was no change in this quarter, the bombardment continuing all day. During the action round these two villages the Germans moving across our front suffered very greatly from the massed fire of our horse artillery at short range; but though they fell literally in heaps they still came on with admirable determination. South of the Lys some trenches which had been lost on the previous night were recaptured by us. Otherwise the situation remained as it had been; no attacks were delivered against us; and the enemy contented himself with bombarding our trenches. A heavy battery was knocked out by our artillery fire. One of our prisoners—a Saxon professor—who was captured on the first day he entered the field, stated as his opinion that Germany realized that she had failed in her object, and was only fighting in order to obtain good terms. What his opinion is worth remains to be seen. During the afternoon a German aeroplane was captured quite uninjured.

On Monday, the 2nd, on our left, pressure was still kept up towards Ypres, and at first our line was once more forced back, but it was restored towards evening by a vigorous advance carried out in co-operation with the French, who were rendering us very timely assistance. The maximum effort of the Germans on this day, however, was more to the south of Ypres, as if to drive a wedge between that town on the north and Armentières on the south; and the bombardment of our positions in this quarter of the field was especially heavy, though it was well replied to by a concentric fire from our guns and those of the French. The French counter-attacked in the direction of Wytschaete, which remained disputed ground, fiercely blazing amidst a hail of shells from both sides.

More to the south the enemy advanced in force, but

were checked. Still farther towards our right a hostile attack in the neighbourhood of Armentières met with the same fate. On our extreme right several assaults were repulsed, though at one or two points the Germans gained ground slightly, obtaining possession of Neuve Chapelle.

The inundation round Nieuport had by this day reached the enemy's trenches, and it is stated that two heavy guns and some field artillery had to be abandoned in the mud.

Tuesday, the 3rd, was, on the whole, a comparatively uneventful day, which enabled our troops to get a much-needed rest. In front of Ypres the German infantry ceased to press, but to the south, in the neighbourhood of Wytschaete and Hollebeke, they made unsuccessful attempts to get forward, effective counter-attacks being delivered by the French and British. In this quarter the fighting was of a severe nature.

South of the river there were some minor attacks against our trenches, which were beaten off. It seemed that the violence of the German efforts was abating, even the cannonade being in some places less heavy than it had been.

VI

FURTHER OPERATIONS ROUND YPRES

(*November 4—November 12, 1914.*)

November 10, 1914.

In describing the operations for the six days from November 4 to 9, it can be said that during that period the Germans have nowhere along our front made an attack in great force, such as was launched against Ypres at the end of October. What they may be contemplating remains to be seen. Their policy has appeared to be to wear us out by continual bombardment interspersed with local assaults at different points. As regards their artillery attack—which has now continued without cessation for days—wonder is aroused as to when this prodigal expenditure of ammunition will cease, for it has not produced its obviously calculated effect of breaking the defence in preparation for the advance of their infantry. So far the latter have been the chief sufferers from the tactics employed.

On Wednesday, the 4th, they renewed the attack east of Ypres; but their efforts bore no resemblance to those which had preceded it, being more in the nature of a demonstration in force than a serious attempt to drive in our line, and it was beaten off with ease. By then our men had been reinforced, had enjoyed some rest, and had had time to improve their trenches in different ways. Moreover, the consciousness that they had repelled one great effort of the enemy, was a moral factor of no small value.

Farther to the south, on our left centre, the French advanced under cover of our guns and made some

progress in spite of the heavy fire brought to bear on them from the enemy's massed batteries. On our centre all was quiet. On the right our Indian troops scored a success by capturing and filling in some trenches in which the enemy had established himself only 50 yards from our lines under cover of some heavy artillery brought up after dark.

On our extreme left, one of our howitzer batteries—whose fire was being most effectively directed—selected as its first target a farm from which a machine gun was harassing our infantry. It scored a hit at the first round and knocked out the machine gun. The second target was a house occupied by snipers. This was set alight by a shell, and when the occupants bolted they came under the rapid fire of our infantry. The third target was another building from which the Germans were driven and then caught in the open by shrapnel. One of our heavy batteries, also, obtained several direct hits on the enemy's guns.

Thursday was another comparatively quiet day, there being no attempt at an infantry attack against any point of our line. South-east of Ypres the Germans maintained a heavy bombardment on one section of our front, but generally speaking their artillery fire was not so heavy as it had been. Somewhat to the south the French made some slight progress and recaptured some ground.

Farther to the south two villages which the enemy had captured and their line on a ridge close by were heavily bombarded by the British and French artillery. From the high ground to the west the effect of this cannonade could be seen to some extent, though the villages under fire were partially obscured from view by the smoke of the bursting shells, and resembled the craters of volcanoes belching fire and fumes. At one place the gaunt wreck of the old church tower and the blackened remains of a few houses round it would emerge for a moment, only to be again blotted out in the pall of smoke. The long, straggling villages, when they became temporarily visible, seemed to melt away and assume odd and fantastic shapes as the houses crumbled and the blocks of masonry

were thrown hither and thither by the blasting effect of lyddite and melinite.

The result of this artillery work was most satisfactory. When the Germans were seen to be running from the shelter which had ceased to act as such they were caught and mowed down by the rapid fire of the French field artillery. Against a suitable target the action of the French 75 mm. field-guns—or “les soixante-quinze” as they are always affectionately called—is literally terrific, and must be seen to be realized. On the whole, the ground which the Germans have gained in this direction has so far proved a somewhat barren acquisition. It is so exposed that it proves a death-trap for their troops and they can derive no advantage from its possession.

Along the rest of our line nothing of special interest occurred. Farther south our aeroplanes and those of the French scored a success by partially destroying two of the old forts of Lille. Fort Englos was blown up on the 4th and Fort Carnot on the 5th. They were most probably used as magazines, and may have been of some tactical importance as *points d'appui* in the line of entrenchments.

On Friday, the 6th, the attack was renewed south of the Menin-Ypres high road, but it was repulsed without difficulty. Against the south-east of Ypres, which town had been subjected to a bombardment during the night and was also shelled during the day, a fairly strong advance was made in the afternoon, and the enemy gained some ground. The French, however, made a counter-stroke supported by us, and by nightfall recovered all the lost ground. The French attack on the two villages which had been shelled on Thursday made considerable progress, one point being captured, but the enemy contrived to render the position untenable, and our Allies had retired from the hill by dusk. On our centre nothing of particular interest occurred. On our right, south of the Lys, the enemy made two unsuccessful night attacks. 6

On Saturday, the 7th, on our left the enemy in the afternoon again attacked on the east and south-east of Ypres. Along the Menin Road our line was at one point

forced back, only to be regained after a few minutes. About 4 p.m. the Germans appeared to be massing opposite our line south-east of Ypres, and the pressure was for a time severe, although the attack was not driven home. Slightly farther to the south the fighting continued with unabated fury and resulted in a gain to our Allies. About 400 of the enemy advanced from the cover of a wood against the French, half of them, with most reckless bravery, came on to close quarters and were all shot or bayoneted. A tremendous cannonade was maintained by both sides in this direction, the Allies pouring a hail of shells all along the ridge facing them held by the Germans, and the latter bombarding some high ground and a valley to the east of it in our possession. Three machine guns were captured by us during the day.

On our centre there was a recrudescence of activity on the enemy's part. During the previous night some six battalions of Saxons had succeeded in capturing some of our trenches, only to be driven out by a counter-attack which resulted in one officer and 70 men being taken prisoners. The Germans, however, refused to accept defeat, and, returning to the charge, again occupied some of our trenches and penetrated into a wood. They were again counter-attacked and cleared out of the wood, but continued in possession of part of our line and also some houses which commanded them. Farther south, again, the enemy behaved with great boldness, sapping up to within a short distance of our trenches.

Some of the prisoners captured on this day were very young. They stated that their corps had lately been brought up to strength with new recruits who had received only a few weeks' training.

Throughout the recent fighting Sunday has proved to be a day of activity, and November 8 was no exception to the rule. On the left the morning passed quietly so far as the British were concerned. To the south-east of Ypres the French continued to give us considerable support and pressed forward. At 2.30 p.m. the daily attack on our line was made—this time in force to the north of the Menin-Ypres high road; and again did the

enemy succeed in temporarily piercing our front. They were driven back, however, and all the ground lost by us was regained before dark. After this repulse 107 dead Germans were counted in front of one battalion, the total hostile force engaged being estimated at 2,000.

These strong attacks are accompanied or preceded by attempts to press at other points, which are usually attended with heavy loss. An instance of the cost to the enemy of these subsidiary operations occurred on this day, when one of our battalions killed 47 Germans, this number being actually counted in front of our trenches, and captured 51. It is calculated that on Sunday their casualties in killed and wounded in front of one small section of our line were about 1,200. Ypres itself was again subjected to heavy shelling, and some damage was done to the town.

In front of our right centre the enemy fell back slightly, while farther south, to the north of the Lys, he continued to occupy the trenches and houses he had secured, but was unable to reinforce this point and so consolidate his position, for the ground was swept by the fire of our guns and enfiladed from our trenches. To the south of the Lys the hostile attacks were renewed without success on the night of the 7th-8th. On our right also a minor effort met with the same fate.

Monday, the 9th, was a comparatively quiet day. On our left the shelling was less. In this direction the Germans for the time being desisted from making attacks in force and confined their efforts to minor assaults and to the wanton destruction of Ypres, which with Louvain and Reims is apparently to be included among the monuments to German "culture." During the fighting of the 7th, 8th, and 10th, 110 prisoners and six machine guns were captured by us in this quarter.

Slightly to the south the French made some progress, while on our centre the situation remained much the same as it has been. The houses and trenches gained by the Germans remained in their hands during the day, but measures were taken to overcome their resistance, and at night part of the ground was retaken by us. On our

right during the night of the 8th-9th a German trench was captured; otherwise the situation did not alter.

Night attacks have been, of regular occurrence at different points and are made apparently more with a view to annoying our troops and preventing them sleeping than with any other object. Sometimes, of course, the advance has been of a more serious nature and has been carried out by large bodies. In such cases the Germans have so far invariably lost heavily, and even if they have succeeded in gaining our first line of trenches, have almost always been driven out again. The demonstrations would appear to be proportionately more costly and even more useless than the heavier attacks. Similar tactics were a feature of the fighting on the Aisne, and to judge by the diaries we have obtained from German soldiers their futility is fully appreciated by the men. They are usually made from the trenches in rear of the front line, the latter being only lightly held.

The front lines of both sides are now at many points so close that our men amuse themselves by listening to what goes on in the enemy's trenches. The Germans frequently cheer themselves up with music or singing, while on one occasion the usual programme was varied by a violent quarrel which appeared to have culminated in a free fight.

On the whole there is evidence to show that the Germans are beginning to be affected by their heavy losses. From prisoners it is gathered that the young men of the new corps cannot withstand the fatigues and privations of campaigning, and that the middle-aged men lack ardour. From the same source, also, it is learned that recruits who have not previously served have only received some eight or nine weeks' training instead of the 12 weeks' course prescribed for them, that they have had practically no instruction in musketry, and that they have not practised entrenching.

On the other hand, too much can be made of these side-lights on the present condition of the enemy. They are still fighting with a stubbornness and recklessness which, whatever its futility, is remarkable when exhibited by

forces of which a large proportion consists of comparatively untrained men. The following two incidents serve to illustrate their courage:—

During the fighting near Ypres a force consisting of about one company of infantry advancing against us was enfiladed by one of our machine guns, with the result that they were all killed except six men who crawled away wounded. The corpses lay in a regular row. After nightfall another company of the Germans, nothing daunted, advanced and dug themselves in on the line upon which the bodies of their comrades were lying. Again, on November 4, some of the enemy's cavalry at dusk charged a trench held by the French. Every single horse was killed; but those riders who were not hit continued the charge on foot, the last survivors being slain on the very parapet of the trench.

And, whatever deterioration there may be in the material now being drafted into the ranks of our enemy, it must be admitted that the Prussian war machine, acting on a nation previously inured to the sternest discipline, has obtained the most remarkable results. The Germans have up to the present time been able to make good their losses, to continue to deliver repeated blows with fresh men when required and where required, and to concentrate large forces in different directions. It is true that a considerable proportion of the masses recently thrown into the field against the British has consisted of hastily trained and immature men; but the great fact remains that these ill-assorted levies have not hesitated to advance against highly trained troops.

In spite of lack of officers, in spite of inexperience, boys of 16 and 17 have faced our guns, marched steadily up to the muzzles of our rifles, and have met death in droves, without flinching. Such is the effect of a century of national discipline. That the men subjected to it are the victims of an autocratic military caste does not alter the fact that they have accepted that system as necessary to the attainment of national ideals. However discordant the elements which make up the German Empire, by the force of the Prussian war machine they have one and all

been welded together to be able to fight for national existence, and by their actions it is evident that for them "Deutschland über Alles" is no empty cry.

November 13, 1914.

The diminution in force of what may by a paraphrase be described as the German *Drang nach Westen* in this quarter has not lasted long. The section of front to the north of us was the first to meet the recrudescence of violence in the shape of an attack by the enemy in the neighbourhood of Dixmude and Bixschoote. Our turn came next, and after eight days of a comparative relaxation of pressure—from Tuesday, the 3rd, to Tuesday, the 10th—the 11th saw a repetition of the great attempt to break through our line to the French coast.

What was realized might happen has happened. In spite of the immense losses suffered by the enemy during the five days' attack against Ypres which lasted from ^SOctober 29 to the 2nd of this month, the cessation of _ftheir more violent efforts on the latter day was not an abandonment of the whole project, but a temporary relinquishment of the main offensive until fresh troops should be massed to carry on what was proving to be a somewhat costly and difficult operation.

Meanwhile, as has been pointed out, the interval was employed in endeavouring to wear out the Allies by repeated local attacks of varying force and to shatter them by a prolonged and concentrated bombardment. By the 11th, therefore, it seems that they must have considered that they had attained both objects, for on that day, as will be described, recommenced the desperate battle for the possession of Ypres and its neighbourhood. Though the struggle has not yet come to an end, this much can be said:—The Germans have gained some ground, but they have not captured Ypres. In repulsing the enemy so far we have naturally suffered heavy casualties. But battles of this fierce and prolonged nature cannot but be costly to both sides; and we have the satisfaction of knowing that we have foiled the enemy in what appears at present to be his main object in the

western theatre of operations and have inflicted immensely greater loss on him than those suffered by ourselves.

To carry on the narrative for the three days, the 10th, 11th, and 12th November, Tuesday, the 10th, was for us uneventful. Beyond our left flank the enemy advanced in force against the French, but were repulsed. On our left, however, along the greater part of our front the shelling was less severe; and no infantry attacks took place. South-east of Ypres the enemy kept up a very heavy bombardment against our line as well as that of the French; and on our left centre the situation remained unchanged, both sides contenting themselves with a furious cannonade.

In our centre the Germans retained their hold on the small extent of ground they had gained from us, but in doing so incurred heavy loss from our artillery and machine guns' fire. Incidentally, one of the houses held by them was so knocked about by our fire that its defenders bolted. On their way to the rear they were met by reinforcements under an officer, who halted them, evidently in an endeavour to persuade them to return. While the parley was going on one of our machine guns was quietly moved to a position of vantage, whence it opened a most effective fire on the group. On our right one of the enemy's saps which was being pushed towards our line was attacked by us and all the men in it were captured.

As has been said, Wednesday, the 11th, was another day of desperate fighting. So soon as day broke the Germans opened up on our trenches to the north and south of Menin-Ypres Road what was probably the most furious artillery fire that they have yet employed against us, and a few hours later followed up this bombardment by an infantry assault in force. This was carried out by the 1st and 4th Brigades of the Guard Corps, which, as we now know from prisoners, had been sent for in order to make a supreme effort to capture Ypres, that task having proved too heavy for the Infantry of the Line.

As the attackers surged forward they were met by our frontal fire, and since they were moving diagonally across

part of our front were also taken in flank by artillery, rifles, and machine guns. Though their casualties before they reached our line must have been enormous, such was their resolution and the momentum of the mass that, in spite of the splendid resistance of our troops, they succeeded in breaking through our line in three places near the road. They penetrated for some distance into the woods behind our trenches, but were counter-attacked and again enfiladed by machine guns and driven back to the line of trenches, a certain portion of which they succeeded in holding, in spite of our efforts to expel them. What their total losses must have been during the advance can to some extent be gauged from the fact that the number of dead left in the woods behind our line alone amounted to seven hundred.

A simultaneous effort made to the south of the road, as part of the same operation, though not carried out by the Guard Corps, failed entirely, for when the attacking infantry massed in the woods close to our line our guns opened upon them with such effect that they did not push the assault home.

As generally happens in operations in wooded country, the fighting was to a great extent carried on at close quarters and was of the most desperate and confused description. Indeed, the scattered bodies of the enemy who penetrated into the woods in rear of our position could neither go backwards nor forwards, and were nearly all killed or captured.

The portion of the line south-east of Ypres held by us was heavily shelled, but did not undergo any very serious infantry attack. That occupied by the French, however, was both bombarded and fiercely assaulted. On the rest of our front, save for the usual bombardment, all was comparatively quiet. On the right one of our trenches was mined and then abandoned. So soon as it was occupied by the enemy the charges were fired, and several Germans were blown to pieces.

Thursday, the 12th, was marked by a partial lull in the fighting all along our line. To the north of us the German force which had crossed the Yser and entrenched

on the left bank was annihilated by a night attack with the bayonet executed by the French. Slightly to the south the enemy was forced back for a distance of about three-quarters of a mile. Immédiately to our left the French were strongly attacked and driven back a short distance, our extreme left having to conform to the movement. But our Allies soon recovered the ground they had lost, which enabled us to advance also. To the south-east of Ypres the enemy's snipers were very active. On our centre and right the enemy's bombardment was maintained, but nothing worthy of special note occurred.

The fact that on this day the advance against our line in front of Ypres was not pushed home after such an effort as had been made on Wednesday tends to show that for the moment at least the attacking troops had had enough.

Although the failure of this great attack by the Guard Corps to accomplish its object cannot yet be described as a decisive event, it possibly marks the culmination, if not the close, of a second stage in the attempt to capture Ypres, and is therefore not without significance. It has also a dramatic interest of its own. Having once definitely failed to achieve this object by means of sheer weight of numbers, as already explained, and having done their best to wear us down in the manner already described, the Germans brought up fresh picked troops to carry Ypres salient by an assault from north, south, and east.

That the Guard Corps should have been selected to act against the eastern edge of the salient may perhaps be taken as a proof of the necessity felt by the Germans to gain this point in the line, and their dogged perseverance in the pursuance of their objective claims our whole-hearted admiration. The failure of one great attack, heralded as it was by impassioned appeals to the troops, made in the presence of the Emperor himself, but carried out by partially trained men, has been only the signal for another desperate effort in which the place of honour was assigned to the *Corps d'Élite* of the German Army.

It must be admitted that that corps has retained that reputation for courage and contempt of death which it earned in 1870, when Emperor William 1st, after the

battle of Gravelotte, wrote, " My Guard has found its grave in front of St. Privat." And the swarms of men who came up so bravely to the British rifles in the woods round Ypres repeated the tactics of 44 years ago, when their dense columns toiling up the slopes of St. Privat melted away under the fire of the French.

That the Germans are cunning fighters and are well up in all the tricks of the trade has been frequently pointed out. For instance, they often succeed in ascertaining what regiment or brigade is opposed to them, and, owing to their knowledge of English, are able to employ the information to some purpose. On one recent occasion, having by some means discovered the name of the commander of the company holding a trench they were attacking, they called on him by name, asking if Captain — was there. Fortunately, the pronunciation of the spokesman was somewhat defective, and curiosity was rewarded by discovering that both the officer in question and his men were very much there.

There are reports from so many different quarters of the enemy having been seen wearing British and French uniforms that it is impossible to doubt their truth. One remarkable and absolutely authentic case occurred during the fighting near Ypres. A man dressed in a uniform which resembled that of a British Staff Officer suddenly appeared near our trenches, and walked along the line, asking if many casualties had been suffered, and stating that the situation was serious, and that a general retirement had been ordered. A similar visit was reported by several men in different trenches, and orders were issued that this strange officer was to be detained if again seen. Unluckily, he did not make another appearance.

The following remarks extracted from a German soldier's diary are published, not because there is reason to believe that they are justified as regards the conduct of the German officers, but because they are of interest as a human document:—

" *2nd November.*—Before noon sent out in a regular storm of bullets by order of the major. These gentlemen, the officers, send their men forward in the most ridiculous way. They

themselves remain far behind safely under cover. Our leadership is really scandalous. Enormous losses on our side, partly from the fire of our own people, for our leaders neither know where the enemy lies nor where our own troops are, so that we are often fired on by our own men. It is a marvel to me that we have got on as far as we have done. Our captain fell, also all our section leaders, and a large number of our men. Moreover, no purpose was served by this advance, for we remained the rest of the day under cover, and could go neither forward nor back nor even shoot. A trench we had taken was not occupied by us, and the English naturally took it back at night. That was the sole result. Then, when the enemy had again entrenched themselves, another attack was made costing us many lives and 50 prisoners. It is simply ridiculous, this leadership. If only I had known it before !

"My opinion of the German officers has changed. An adjutant shouted to us from a trench far to the rear to cut down a hedge which was in front of us. Bullets were whistling round from in front and from behind. The gentleman himself, of course, remained behind. The 4th company has now no leaders but a couple of N.C.O.s. When will my turn come ? I hope to goodness I shall get home again !

"Still in the trenches. Shells and shrapnel burst without ceasing. In the evening a cup of rice and one-third of an apple per man. Let us hope peace will soon come. Such a war is really too awful. The English shoot like mad. If no reinforcements come up, especially heavy artillery, we shall have a poor lookout, and must retire.

"The first day I went quietly into the fight with an indifference which astonished me. To-day, for the first time in advancing, when my comrades right and left fell, felt rather nervous, but lost that feeling again soon. One becomes horribly indifferent. Picked up a piece of bread by chance. Thank God ! At least something to eat.

"There are about 70,000 English who must be attacked from all four sides and destroyed. They defend themselves, however, obstinately."

His Majesty the King's message of congratulation to the Commander-in-Chief has caused the liveliest satisfaction amongst all ranks.

November 16, 1914.

The nature of the situation on our front has not altered since the last letter. The Germans have continued to press generally along our line and have focussed their attention mostly round Ypres, though there has up to now not been a resumption of the violent attacks against that place. For the last 10 days the weather has been much against aerial reconnaissances. It has either been so misty that nothing can be seen, or so windy as to interfere with flying. There has also been a good deal of rain, which has added to the discomforts of active service.

Before the course of events during the three days November 13, 14, and 15 is given it may be mentioned that the incident recorded in the last summary of the blowing up of some of the enemy in a mined trench on the night of the 11th has had a curious sequel. Amidst the *débris* hurled into our own trenches by the explosion was found the identity disc of a German soldier belonging to a regiment about whose presence in this quarter there had been much doubt.

Friday, the 13th, was windy with much rain. Trying as life in the trenches is under such conditions, our men have at least the consolation of knowing that the enemy were in a worse plight, for the wind blew steadily in their faces. On our left the morning passed in desultory shelling, which gradually swelled in the afternoon into a fierce bombardment of the section of our line running south to the Menin-Ypres road. This was the prelude to an attack along the whole line round Ypres. The enemy rushed our trenches at one point, but they were driven out again, and the assault was repulsed. Here, again, our losses, though heavy, were much less than those of the Germans. As each successive attempt to take Ypres by assault fails, the bombardment of the unhappy town is renewed with ever-increasing fury.

Further to the south, on our left centre, the situation remained practically unchanged, a little ground being lost here and there and then regained.

On our centre and right, and indeed along the whole of our line, the hostile artillery appears to have received

orders on this day to search the area in rear of our trenches. This no doubt is a part of the policy of wearing down. It is naturally welcome to the men in the trenches that the enemy should expend ammunition on the mere chance of getting a shell or two into our transport or into some brigade or divisional headquarters.

On the right, on the night of the 13th-14th, a German trench was taken by a portion of one of our battalions, the occupants being bayoneted or taken prisoners. A part of another battalion which also advanced during the night encountered some of the enemy who were attempting a similar operation. A hand-to-hand fight ensued in which we came off the victors, killing 25 Germans and only losing two ourselves.

Saturday was very cold. There was also some rain. On our left, proceedings were started with the usual heavy shelling, and the Germans again resumed the offensive in the afternoon south of the Menin-Ypres road, with a similar result to that obtained on the previous day. They penetrated our line at one or two points, but were soon driven out and the line was almost completely restored. Farther to the south the French made an attack near Wytschaete and gained some ground under cover of a very heavy fire from their guns. In the afternoon our left centre was subjected to shelling alone, and in our centre Armentières was subjected to similar treatment. The town is now practically deserted by its inhabitants.

During the day Béthune was bombarded by the enemy, who continued to devote his attention to towns, villages, and roads in rear of our line rather than to the trenches themselves.

On Sunday, the 15th, on our left, east of Ypres, a well-conducted counter-attack was carried out against that portion of the line occupied by the enemy on the previous day, where he had established himself in some stables and trenches. Two attempts had already failed, when, at 5.30 a.m., a gun was brought up to within 300 yards' range. After four rounds had been fired a storming party succeeded in carrying the position. The subaltern in

command being killed, the attack was led by a company sergeant-major. This non-commissioned officer was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal, but has since died of his wounds.

The bombardment slackened considerably in this quarter during the day. About 3 p.m. a half-hearted attack was executed up the Menin Road, but the enemy never got to close quarters. On the south-east of Ypres between Hollebeke and Wytschaete there was some hard fighting, in which the French held their ground.

On our left centre nothing occurred beyond the usual shelling. In the centre we scored a local success. Some of the trenches and houses lately captured by the Germans were heavily bombarded by our howitzers, with the result that the defenders were bolted from the position and caught by the fire of our machine guns as they retired, losing about half their number. On our right all was quiet.

The weather on this day was about the worst we have yet experienced. It was bitterly cold, and rain fell in torrents. Nevertheless, in spite of all difficulties, our aviators carried out a successful reconnaissance. For some time they hovered over the German lines observing the emplacements of batteries and searching the roads for hostile columns in the midst of a storm of driving snow and sleet which was encountered at high altitudes.

Further information has recently come to hand regarding the enemy's methods of sniping and spying upon our dispositions. Non-commissioned officers are offered Iron Crosses if they will penetrate our lines at night. Those that attempt this work, having discarded boots, helmets, and other impedimenta, crawl as close as possible to our defences and try to attract the attention of one of our sentries by throwing a stone in a direction contrary to that in which they are crawling. This generally causes the neighbouring sentries to fire, thus betraying their positions and that of our line of trenches. These spies or snipers often wear khaki uniform and woollen caps similar to those worn by our men, and thus disguised sometimes succeed in getting right behind our lines to

favourable spots from which they shoot men passing to and fro. Many of them speak English well and display great ingenuity and effrontery in getting out of tight corners.

Another reason for penetrating our lines is the cutting of telephone wires; and behind one section of our front the breaks have of late been very frequent. That the damage has not been entirely due to bursting shells has now been proved by the capture of one of the enemy's secret agents carrying wire-cutters and a rifle. The man was known to have been on intimate terms with the Germans before they retired from the area now occupied by us. He was shot.

The following is an account of the heroic conduct of a French medical officer who, while in charge of the Medical Corps of one of the French divisions, was attending to the wounded in the Civil Hospital at Ypres during the bombardment of that place. On November 9 he commenced a letter explaining the situation at that time:—

I have the honour to inform you that for the last four days, with the help of volunteer assistants, I have been attending to 54 German wounded at the Civil Hospital at Ypres. The hospital has been struck by six shells, one of which was an incendiary shell.

Bread is failing, and my assistants are sharing their own with the wounded Germans. . . .

The letter continued that, to a suggestion that, since the position of the hospital and the danger incurred by their own men was known to the Germans and these considerations did not appear to affect them, there was no reason why the French should concern themselves any longer about their fate, his answer had been as follows:—

I replied that our superiority consisted precisely in showing to this race of vandals that we possess those humanitarian feelings of which they seem to be devoid, and that we should do this because example is the only law which nations obey. If we imitate the Germans there is no reason why the present state of things should not continue for ever, for we are merely

descending to their level, whereas the mission of France is to elevate the Germans to our own.

So long as I remain here, by your leave, I will continue to look after the wounded Germans, showing them that a French doctor laughs at their shells and only knows his duty.

On November 10, when the situation improved slightly he wrote:—

Two nursing sisters have returned from Poperinghe, crying driven hither by remorse for having abandoned their sick charges. . . .

I am continuing to dress the wounded. There are now only 52. Two have just died. The others are in a very grave condition; their wounds are suppurating. All the men but one are in bed; one is suffering from tetanus.

This was the officer's last message, though, with the nuns, he remained in that hell for at least three days longer. He is reported to have been killed by a shell on the 13th or 14th, and on the morning of the 14th the surviving wounded were in sole charge of the nuns who had remained faithful to the last. The Frenchman had died at his post tending the maimed and suffering enemy. And his devotion was not in vain, for on the evening of the 14th the wounded Germans for whom he had laid down his life were taken to a place of safety.

It is with great grief that the Army has learnt of the death of Field-Marshal Earl Roberts. Though he died in the middle of his visit to us, he lived long enough to take what has proved to be a last farewell of the Indian troops amongst whom he began his career 60 years ago, and with whom so much of his life has been associated. Moreover, it is felt that he has met the end he would have wished, on active service as a soldier. At an age when he might well have claimed a rest he has set a glorious example of patriotism, remaining in harness and carrying on the work to which he had devoted his life by coming out to greet those fighting for their country on the great day of trial—that day whose arrival he had so clearly foreseen and for which he had so earnestly striven to prepare the nation.

VII

SIEGE WARFARE

(November 16—December 12, 1914.)

November 20, 1914.

Once more there is no change to record in the military situation on our front. With the exception of an attack in force, again upon our left, on the 17th, the four days from the 16th to the 19th have been unusually uneventful. The great change that has occurred has been in the weather, for winter has now set in in earnest. A miserable afternoon of snow and slush has been succeeded by a night of frost, and this morning is keen, calm, and bright, and promises well for the airmen, who have recently been so much hampered in their work.

In regard to the exact situation at Ypres, since certain misstatements to the effect that the Germans had penetrated the town and been driven out again have apparently been circulated it may be as well to state that Ypres is in the hands of the Allies, and that, save for prisoners of war, or possibly spies, no Germans have succeeded in entering the town or even getting near entering it. The Allied position there is stronger than it has ever been.

On Monday, the 16th, our troops on the left passed the most peaceful day they have experienced during the last month. There was little shelling and no infantry attacks were made. A prisoner asserted that it had been the intention of the Germans to assault in this quarter on the 15th, but that the damage inflicted by our artillery on the previous day had been so heavy that it had been decided to postpone the operation until reinforcements should arrive. There is no doubt that on the 19th, in massing preparatory to the attack, the Germans had

committed certain faults and so given a good opportunity for our guns and maxims, which was at once seized, with devastating results to the rear battalions.

The fighting to the south of Ypres continued without any marked advantage to either side, but the French everywhere held their ground; on our centre all was quiet; and on our right the enemy continued to show some activity in pushing forward saps and throwing bombs from their trench mortars. One of their sap-heads was successfully attacked during the night, and an earth-boring tool was captured.

On Tuesday nothing particular occurred along our line except, as has been stated, on the left, where the Germans made yet another effort in the direction of Ypres. After shelling our positions to the east and south-east they made three attacks. About 1 p.m. their infantry advanced in strength against our section of this line and took possession of some trenches out of which our troops had been driven by shell fire. When they endeavoured to press on, however, our infantry made a brilliant counter-attack with the bayonet and drove them out of the trenches and for some 500 yards beyond.

The second attempt was made farther to the south-west, and was pressed to within five yards of our line before it was broken by our rifle fire. On this occasion the Germans advanced obliquely across our front again and suffered very severely both from our rifle and gun fire. The number of killed left in front of a length of some 500 yards of our front is estimated at about 1,200. The assault was made by Regular troops, though not by the Guard. About 3 p.m. they massed for a third assault, but on being subjected to a hot shell fire they gave up the attempt. On the whole it was a most successful day for our arms.

Wednesday, the 18th, was another quiet day, and nothing occurred except shelling. On our right the enemy contented himself with sapping. It was stated that owing to the high tide the inundation was extending satisfactorily to the south-east of Dixmude.

Thursday, the 19th, was also uneventful. Our trench mortars were used for the first time with good results.

The successful resistance we have up to the present made to all the efforts of the enemy has had a very encouraging effect; and in spite of the exhausting nature of the operations of the past month our men show great enterprise in making local counter-attacks, in cutting off the enemy's patrols, and in similar "affairs of outposts."

Frequent allusion has been made to the losses of the enemy. Round Ypres we are continually finding fresh evidence of the slaughter inflicted. On the 15th one of our battalions upon advancing discovered a German trench manned by 17 corpses, while there were 49 more in a house close by. Next day a patrol discovered 60 dead in front of one trench and 50 opposite another. In fact, all the farms and cottages to our front are charnel houses. The significance of such small numbers lies only in the fact that they represent the killed in a very small area. According to prisoners, the German attempts to take Ypres have proved costly. One man stated that there were only 15 survivors out of his platoon, which went into action 50 strong; another reported that of 250 men who advanced with him only 19 returned.

It is believed that one Bavarian regiment 3,000 strong, which left Bavaria for the front on October 19, had only 1,200 men left before the attack made along the Menin-Ypres road on November 14, in which it again suffered severely. The plight of some of the units of the new formations is even worse, one regiment of the XXIIIrd Reserve Corps having but 600 men out of 3,000. If the period since the beginning of the war is considered, the numbers are greater. For instance, of the XVth Corps, one regiment has lost 60 officers and 2,560 men, and another has lost 3,000 men. These figures include casualties of every kind—killed, wounded, missing.

On all four days the weather has been bad. Generally fine and frosty in the early morning, it has turned to heavy rain as the day has worn on. On Thursday there was a variation and snow started to fall about 1 p.m. and continued till about 6 o'clock. It fell in large soft flakes, and covered the ground to a depth of perhaps nearly two inches, but melted under foot. The state of

the roads, already bad, was rendered worse, while the condition of the trenches became wretched beyond description. From having to sit or stand in a mixture of straw and liquid mud the men had to contend with half-frozen slush. "It is an ill wind," however, and the one good point about the wet weather of the last few days is that it has made the ground so soft that the enemy's howitzer shells sink for some depth before they detonate and expend a great part of their energy in an upward direction, throwing mud about.

Nevertheless, the wet and cold has added greatly to the hardships of the troops in the trenches; and the problem of how to enable them to keep their feet reasonably dry and warm is now engaging serious attention. At one place, owing to the kindness of the proprietor, certain works have recently been placed at our disposal as a wholesale bath house, lavatory, and repair shop. In the works are a number of vats large enough to contain several men at one time, and they serve most excellently for the provision of hot baths for the men on relief from the trenches. Whilst they are enjoying a bath their clothes are taken away. The underclothing is washed or burnt and replaced by a new set, whilst the uniform is fumigated, cleaned, and repaired, and buttons are sewn on and repairs done by a gang of women who are employed for the purpose. At this installation some 1,500 men are catered for every day.

What this rehabilitation really means to the soldiers can alone be appreciated from a realization of their previous state. It must be remembered that they have not only not bathed for weeks, they have not even been able to take off their clothes, and consequently in many cases officers as well as men are verminous. As the latter troop up to the bath they are, to say the least of it, unprepossessing in appearance. Weary, unshorn, and haggard, they are coated with mud, a good deal of which has crusted on them, and some are splashed with the blood of their comrades or of the enemy. When they come out clean, refreshed, and reclothed, they are different beings. And ~~naturally~~ ~~it is~~ a good thing from

the point of view of the happiness and comfort of the individual; it is a distinct gain in his fighting value and an asset to the force to which he belongs.

Nevertheless, bodily the men are in good condition. Food in abundance has reached them regularly, except in a few cases such as are incidental to trench warfare.

November 21, 1914.

The following is a collection of extracts from the diaries of German soldiers. Except the last two, they have no special bearing on the present phase of the operations, for they refer to a period which has now passed; but they throw some light on the different aspects of the actual fighting, and may, therefore, be of interest to those who have no first-hand experience. They throw light, also, upon the psychological side of warfare and upon the manner in which their experiences affect the more impressionable of the men engaged. In this connection the effect produced by shell fire on the minds of the writers is somewhat remarkable, though their estimates of the losses suffered may be over the mark. Those of us in the field are sufficiently uncharitable to derive comfort from any revelation of the success of our operations, whether it be in the nature of the actual damage inflicted or of the depression caused thereby.

From the Diary of a Man of the 9th Jäger Battalion.

"We got our (? machine) guns into position, but did not fire, as we were informed that it was our 114th Infantry Regiment that was shooting at us. It was only by sounding the *Wacht am Rhein* that we were able to bring the fellows to their senses.

The enemy's artillery fire was now directed more to the left. Our regiment began to retire. How the shells followed us! One exploded three yards from our gun-carriage, and showered earth all over us, but did no further damage. Another dropped just in front and wounded two men mortally, and then a third exploded twenty yards ahead, right in the middle of a column, killing 12 men outright. A horrible sight! We were retiring on the village of St. Pol. Luckily the enemy's fire did not follow us here, for there would

certainly have been a panic. One company leader, Lieutenant Fuchs, was killed by a piece of shell, and our Captain is now the only officer we have left.

On this day our position was literally plastered by the heavy French naval guns. One projectile fell in a trench, killing 9 men and wounding several others severely. Another fell in a trench of the 10th Company with the same deadly effect. An enormous shell exploded near the 11th Company trench, destroying 15 yards of it and burying some 12 men. One of the howitzer batteries of the 30th Artillery Regiment suffered very severely. Two of its guns were hit and broken up. At the end of the day we all felt very bad."

* * * * *

The 142nd Regiment, lying to the right of us, suffered very much and had to keep on withdrawing, as shell after shell was falling right in its trenches, and the men were absolutely exhausted. When shells are dropping in front, behind, to the right, and to the left, to remain in suspense continually in expectation of death or injury without being able to make any resistance, and to hear the screams of wounded who cannot be attended to in the narrow trenches, is a sensation which can be appreciated only by those who have experienced it."

From a Letter of a Gunner of the Field Artillery.

No. 11.

21/10/14.

"On the 26th September a French aviator dropped a bomb on Cambrai, killing 4 Landwehr men and tearing off the arm of the Paymaster. On the 29th we were again sent to Verdun, south of Arlon. . . . On the 4th October in Mons, thence to Lille. On the 8th October our 2nd Battery suffered heavy losses at Dulle (?), losing 7 men and 19 horses. On the 11th we did not come into action, but took 20 prisoners."

From a Letter of a Man of the 9th Jager Battalion.

21/10/14.

"We reached Peronne on the 27th September. We were then ordered to march on Combre (?) in the Amiens District. We were attached to the Cavalry Division, to support it and also to cover the flank of the Guard Division.

On the 5th October we reached Lens, and on the 7th took

up a position at Jeuer. The enemy shelled us so heavily all day that Lieut. B. gave the order to retire at 4 p.m., and we lost touch of the other companies. We retreated under terrible rifle and shell fire, and had hardly arrived under cover when our captain drove us out again to our old position. The fire was so heavy on our return that I was surprised that we got there at all; it was so terrible that one could imagine hell had opened up and was pouring fire out of a thousand craters. I spent the most terrible hours of my life that day. The awful bombardment continued, our artillery not being able to give us any protection. At noon the next day we were forced to retire. This movement took place under still heavier artillery and machine gun fire. How I survived is a wonder."

From the Diary of a Bavarian Non-Commissioned Officer.

"31/8/14.—We suffered terribly from the enemy's artillery. The village is in ruins and is like a slaughter-house; dead horses, bodies of men torn to bits, pools of blood—a picture of horror. The 5th G. Regiment is marching up to relieve us. This regiment has already been decimated in the fighting a day or two ago.

The enemy directs a hellish shell fire against us and our artillery; one battery is destroyed, and ammunition wagon is on fire; wounded are crying out. Even the bravest trembles. My men tell their rosaries continually. Only One Above can help us.

8/9/14.—Yesterday one of our sections was surprised by the enemy and almost annihilated. Only two men survive.

8/10/14.—We are now near the town of Arras in the N.W. of France. I am now leader (as Sergeant) of my company, as all our officers have either been killed or wounded. We have suffered terrible losses during the last few days. Yesterday I was nearly killed, a bullet hitting my belt buckle."

*From a Letter of a Man of the 246th Reserve Regiment
(XXVIIth Reserve Corps).*

"On the 24th October we were ordered to be ready for an assault before dawn. We had hardly advanced 500 yards when we were met by a terrific shell fire from the English. When we were collected again I found what an awful disaster

had overtaken us. Of our battalion scarcely 80 men came through."

(*Note.*—This apparently refers to one of the preliminary attacks in the neighbourhood of Ypres.)

From a Letter of a Man of the 242nd Reserve Regiment of the Same Corps.

"The shooting of the English artillery is marvellous. They get the right range and direction every shot, and place each shell within a yard of the previous one. They must be wonderfully well informed of our movements. I don't know whether the intelligence is obtained by their aeroplanes, which are always hovering over us, or whether they have telephones behind our lines."

November 23, 1914.

As regards the progress on our immediate front affairs remain *in statu quo*, and there is no change to record except a climatic one, which has, in this quarter, really affected both sides more than any operations. The cold which set in on the 20th has continued without break. For three days the hard frost was accompanied by brilliant sunshine, but to-day, though the cold continues, the sky is clouded over. According to local authorities and gazetteers the climate of the Pas de Calais is not subject to extremes of temperature, so it is to be hoped that the present severe weather, which is causing great hardship to the troops, in spite of the welcome sunshine, may prove to be only a cold "snap."

It is true that since the snow has frozen hard the men in the firing line are no longer suffering the misery of living in mud and slush which culminated on the evening of the 19th, but it is almost impossible for them to keep warm at night in the open trenches. To give some idea of what life means under such conditions it may be mentioned that many men are so stiff that they have to be lifted out on relief and that some have been admitted to hospital suffering from frostbite. Beyond the hardship inflicted on individuals the change in the weather has chiefly affected aerial reconnaissance and the question of transport.

The former has been much facilitated in two ways. In the bright sunlight and through the clear atmosphere the whole landscape is very clearly visible even from the height at which our aviators are forced to fly by the hostile anti-aircraft guns, while against the white background of snow entrenchments, roads, transports, rolling stock, and troops show up most distinctly. On the other hand, the present cold experienced at high altitudes, intensified by the speed at which the aeroplanes travel through the air, greatly increases the rigour of the work. In spite of the employment of every device for retaining warmth, both pilots and observers have on some recent occasions returned so numb that they have had to be lifted from their machines.

The difficulty of transport and communication has to some extent been reduced by the cold, for as the coating of ice has been worn off or ground up, the *pavé* has become far less slippery than it was when damp and greasy, while for the heavy motor-lorries the frozen ground on the sides of the roads is naturally better than a foot of slippery mud.

To turn to the operations: the 20th, 21st, and 22nd have been as uneventful as the preceding three days. To avoid any misconception, however, it must be explained that the use of this adjective is entirely comparative. What is now considered as uneventful is not so in the peace sense of the word. It merely signifies that no active operation of any special vigour by either side has stood out from the background of artillery bombardment. This continues day and night with varying intensity, hardly ever ceasing altogether, and includes fire from the 42 cm. howitzers—one of which is believed to be in use against our left—down to that of the anti-aircraft spitfires. It implies, also, that hundreds of shells are bursting and detonating along the length of each line, and that men are continually being killed and wounded. And yet, comparatively, even from so small a standpoint of the whole war as that of the British Army alone, uneventful is the only word to apply to such days—days on which scores of lives are being lost.

Friday, the 20th, passed absolutely without any occurrence of special importance. By that time our line had been so much strengthened owing to the arrival of reinforcements as to make it possible for the men in the trenches to be relieved regularly and frequently, and thus to gain the rest they require. It was found that the difficulty of patrolling had been much increased by the snow, the men's figures showing up so clearly against the white background.

In our centre the enemy employed a "silent" gun, which may be pneumatic or worked by some mechanical contrivance. Its chief points appear to be that there is no report of discharge, that the projectile travels through the air without any such warning sound as that made by ordinary shell, and that the first notice received of its arrival is its detonation. So far this weapon has done no damage. On our right centre our artillery made some good practice, especially in the neighbourhood of Neuve Chapelle, where it rendered some of the German trenches untenable. During the day much valuable information was obtained from aerial reconnaissance.

Saturday, the 21st, was of a similar nature to Friday. On our left there was no activity. In the left centre the opposing trenches were at some points not more than 25 to 40 yards apart. In this quarter good effects were being produced by the use of rifle grenades; the shrapnel was found an efficacious means of curbing the German snipers, who were very enterprising. On the right centre the German airmen were active and dropped a bomb on Bailleul. This has no more useful effect in helping on their operations than most of the other similar exploits of their airmen, for the bomb dropped on the hospital. Being fitted with a sensitive fuse which acted on impact with the roof it detonated midway through the ward just below before reaching the floor. Luckily the ward had just been vacated by 40 patients, but one wounded man who had been left behind was again wounded. Every window within a large radius of the explosion was shattered. On our right a German aeroplane was forced to descend in our lines after an action in the air with one of

our machines, and the observing officer and the pilot were made prisoners. They were found to be furnished with proclamations printed in Hindi recommending the native troops to desert.

Sunday, the 22nd, was unusually quiet and more like the Day of Rest than it has been for some time. On our left sniping was again countered by the use of shrapnel. Two more German aeroplanes were brought down, one was chased by one of our machines for some distance, during which a running fight was kept up, in which our aviator was slightly wounded in the hand. It then came down in our lines. When they landed the German observer and pilot appeared to be much surprised and disgusted to discover where they had descended. The officer who succeeded in forcing down this hostile machine had previously flown over Lille, where he had dropped several bombs on the aerodome. The other aeroplane was also chased and forced to descend, but managed to do so inside the German lines. On our right a short section of one trench held by the Indian Corps was blown in by bombs from a trench mortar and had to be abandoned. But, more than counterbalancing this, our heavy guns scored direct hits on two of the German batteries.

Some of the roads behind the enemy's front line in one quarter have, it is believed, become impassable owing partly to the weather conditions existing before the recent drop in temperature and also to the attentions of the Allied artillery. It is possible to render roads impracticable by long range fire from heavy guns, either by shelling any object that attempts to pass, or by merely dropping shell on the road itself. A combination of craters—such as are made by large-calibre high-explosive shell—and a sea of deep mud forms an obstacle difficult of negotiation by motor transport.

Many reports have come in of the excellent results recently achieved by our artillery, especially in repelling the attacks on Ypres, in which quarter of the field our artillery officers say they have had such targets as gunners dream of but seldom see. On one occasion, in order to support our infantry in a counter-attack, one of our guns

was brought up to within 500 yards of the enemy and succeeded almost immediately in getting a direct hit on a German gun, silencing it, and killing several of the infantry at the same time. In another part of the field our trench mortars have been effective in throwing bombs into the enemy's works.

In the kind of warfare now being waged, which is in many cases conducted at very close quarters, the opposing lines being often not so much as 40 yards apart, the strangest situations occasionally arise. Our men and the enemy converse—for many of the Germans understand English—hold shooting competitions, and throw packets of tobacco to one another. These positions in close proximity to the enemy are not unwelcome to our men, for then they are at any rate secure from shell fire, the hostile artillery being unable to shoot at them for fear of hitting its own infantry. Indeed, for either side a trench close to the enemy is often a safer spot than any other in the fighting zone.

A sort of tacit understanding is sometimes reached between the two sides, each reciprocally refraining in certain circumstances from molesting the other. An instance occurred recently, when the men of one of our battalions found that the only means of boiling water for their tea was to carry it in their mess-tins to the smouldering ruins of some farm buildings near by to "hot it up." The Germans, having a like desire to drink their coffee hot, availed themselves of another smouldering building within close rifle range. Friend and foe continued peacefully to make use of the two places for some days, until for some reason or other the Germans broke the truce by putting a bullet into the shoulder of one of our men, thereby cutting off the supply of hot water for both sides for good and all.

The news of the destruction of the *Emden* naturally caused immense satisfaction amongst all ranks; and at one place where the opposing trenches were especially close together it was greeted with cheers and at once thoughtfully passed on with comments to the enemy. The result was that our trench was fired at heavily for

some time. The reaction produced in France by a British success in the Indian Ocean may interest some of those who took part in the naval action.

It is reported that a certain Landwehr brigade, one of whose mail bags has recently been found in front of a German trench, is now fighting on the Russian frontier.

November 26, 1914.

Again there is no change to be reported in the military situation. The break in the weather foreshadowed by the cloudy sky of the 22nd has now arrived, and since the 23rd a thaw has set in. It is consequently again wet underfoot, though the weather has been fine. The narrative for the three days November 23-25 is as follows:—

On Monday, the 23rd, interest centred on the south of the Lys, where the Germans resumed their activity in the neighbourhood of Festubert. In the morning, having sapped towards a certain section of our position and bombarded it with trench mortars, they advanced and succeeded in capturing some of our trenches by a rush. Two counter-attacks were delivered by us in the afternoon, but were stopped by bombs and machine-gun fire.

During the night, however, the enemy was gradually driven from the positions he had captured, losing over 100 killed and 100 prisoners, including three officers. Three machine guns and a trench mortar were also taken. This counter-attack was carried out in the face of heavy fire from machine guns, our British and Indian troops storming the trenches on both flanks and then clearing them by working inwards. The Gurkhas did considerable execution at close quarters with their *kukris*, even penetrating into some of the German trenches, while a grenade party, led by an officer of the Royal Engineers, co-operated with great effect. Our casualties were numerous, as is natural in fighting at such close quarters, but they were not so heavy as those of the enemy.

During the German attack on the 23rd a British officer in charge of a trench in a position of some tactical importance received an urgent telephone message instructing

him to hold on at all costs. His reply was to the effect that he had never had any intention of doing anything else, and that he would be obliged if he could be informed when his men's rations would be sent up.

On this night a minor success was gained a few miles further north by a small party belonging to one of our battalions. After the officer in command had shot the German sentry our men, by rapid fire, cleared three of the enemy's advanced trenches without sustaining any casualties. Our guns then interposed to keep down the fire from other trenches as our men retired. On the rest of our line nothing of interest occurred; the bombardment continued to slacken, being replaced to a great extent by sniping on both sides.

During this war the cavalry have had to play many rôles, varying from charging with the bayonet to sapping and even mining, but November 23 furnished a fresh experience even for them, a brigade being moved by motors, since the road was too slippery for horses.

Tuesday, the 24th, was absolutely uneventful. One of our Territorial battalions proved themselves already adepts at sniping by accounting for seven Germans with a loss of one man to themselves. On our right there was much bomb-throwing on both sides, but the enemy showed no inclination to press on. That night, in the centre of our line, an officer, accompanied by some sappers and an infantry escort, went out in order to mine a farm from which there had been sniping. Under fire from the German trenches they laid the charge and retired. A party of the enemy went into the farm, found the fuse, and cut it.

There was, however, another means of firing the charge which, unluckily for them, they did not discover, and the building and its occupants were blown up.

Wednesday, the 25th, was a comparatively warm day, which, after the cold of the last few nights, came as a great relief to the men in the trenches. All was quiet along our line except on the left, where both sides continued to shell one another's positions. In the centre our troops have contrived to make it extremely unpleasant

for the Germans who gained a foothold on the edge of Ploegsteert Wood some weeks ago. Their position is subjected to a cross fire from all directions, which during the last two days alone has accounted for 19 men. Indeed, since the enemy desisted from his attacks in force the fighting has resolved itself into a competition in sniping and small affairs of outposts all along the line contested with rifle, hand-grenades, bombs from mortars, and mines.

Our aeroplanes have been especially active in offence during the last few days, having dropped 123 bombs on various targets which need not be specified. One of our heavy howitzers also registered a direct hit on a railway station.

Every effort is being made to mitigate the hardships incidental to campaigning in winter. The trenches themselves are heated by braziers and stoves and floored with straw, bricks, and boards. Behind them are shelters and dug-outs of every description most ingeniously contrived so as to give some degree of comfort and facilities for cooking. The men are being provided with skin coats in addition to their greatcoats.

There is remarkably little sickness, which fact is due no doubt to the ample quantity and excellent quality of food, but there have been several cases of frostbite in the feet. Hot baths are being arranged for the men when their turn of duty is over. The arrangements for bathing made at one place already described have now been elaborated, and after bathing a man can rest, drink a cup of coffee, and smoke a cigarette.

The account already given of the repulse of the attack by the Prussian Guard on November 11 was necessarily brief, and no reference was made to the prominent, and, indeed, decisive part played by the artillery. After the enemy had broken through our front line, the situation became most serious, for there were only two field companies of Royal Engineers available at the moment as a reserve in this quarter of the field. On the right front of the German attack, firing through open spaces between the woods, were a heavy battery and a field

battery, which dealt havoc amongst the attackers both before and after they reached our line. But the Germans continued to come on almost up to the guns, some bodies being picked up at a distance of only 70 yards from them.

Realizing that all might be lost unless a firing line of some kind could be established, the battery officers managed to form a line of gunners, regimental cooks, and details of various descriptions. These men stood firm, kept up a steady rifle fire, and checked the assault at a most critical moment, thus enabling other troops to come up to repel it more completely. At another point five Sapper cooks attacked a house containing some Germans who were sniping a French battery at short range. They drove an equal number of Germans from the house, capturing three of them.

One of our artillery officers who was observing for his battery from a building near the firing line found himself completely cut off and in rear of the Germans who had gained our advanced trenches. Not at all perturbed, however, by the strangeness of his situation, and recognizing that a turn of affairs had given him a unique opportunity, he continued for two whole days to direct the fire of the guns by telephone, subsequently rejoining our troops by night.

Another officer of the same regiment who was employed on a similar duty also had a strange experience. Stationed in one of our advanced trenches, he was engulfed in the wave of Germans who suddenly appeared from the mist and pressed on past the trench in which he was ensconced. He then found himself stranded high and dry between the two advancing masses of the enemy. Running down the rear of the front column he succeeded in the fog in escaping to the flank without being noticed.

It speaks wonders for German discipline that their officers should be able to get so much out of their men, but an incident which occurred recently in front of one of our battalions shows that the demands made are sometimes beyond the limit of human endurance. The Germans were holding the edge of a wood, and in order

to attack our trenches had to advance across an open space of some 200 yards. After much shouting and cries of "Vorwärts," the first assault was delivered. It was repelled, and the enemy retired to the shelter of the wood. The assault was repeated a second and then a third time, being on each occasion precluded by louder exhortations. Once again did our listening men hear shouts of "Vorwärts"; but on this occasion these were greeted with loud exclamations of "Nein," "Nein," and no advance was made.

The way in which our troops have been supplied is admittedly one of the features of the campaign. In fact it is probably not saying too much to state that no soldiers in the field have ever been so well fed as are ours to-day. Full credit for this must be given to the branch of the British Army concerned, but at the same time it must be recognized that its efforts would have been in vain except for the whole-hearted co-operation and assistance of the French railway authorities. The railway system has worked without a hitch, and in carrying out a complicated transport task, which has developed in a direction which could not exactly have been foreseen, has proved to what an extent of elastic efficiency the organization has been brought by preparation and practice in peace manœuvres. Amidst all its multifarious duties in supplying the French troops spread over an arc of some 350 miles it has never once failed in the additional duty of acting as a line of communication for the British Army.

November 26, 1914.

As was said in the last narrative, there has recently been a lull in active operations. No progress has been made by either side in our sphere of action, and no change has occurred in the situation of the British relative to the enemy. Yet there has come about an important modification in the scope of the part played by our army as a whole. This modification, comprising a readjustment of our forces, has been maturing for some time, and has now been completed. It can therefore be referred

to in some detail in the course of a brief general review of the development of the situation of the Expeditionary Force during the past six weeks.

When that force was transferred northwards from the Aisne to the neighbourhood of the Belgian frontier during the first days of October, its task was to prolong the left flank of the French and to prosecute farther north the action which they had been so gallantly carrying on for a month on our left, from Soissons up to the north of Arras, and also to join hands with the French and Belgian forces on the coast. Incidentally, in attempting this, it was compelled to assume responsibility for a very extended section of front. That this was so was due to the exigencies of the moment and to the numerical inadequacy of the British Army for the part it was forced to play by the course taken by the war.

It is necessary to point out that in any appreciation of the rôle played by our forces in the past, being played in the present, or to be played in the future, sight must never be lost of the fact that they are not waging this war single-handed, and that their deeds, important as they naturally must appear to us, represent but a small fraction of the joint action of the Allies in the Western theatre of war. Geographically the extent of front for which the British were responsible during October was in length less than one-twelfth of the immense line, from Switzerland on the right, to the English Channel on the left, held by the Allies. This being so, it is obvious that by far the greater share of the common task of opposing the enemy—a share which they have splendidly performed—has fallen and still falls to the French, while the Belgians have played an important, almost vital, part.

This extended front having been taken up by our Army, what happened? As has already been pointed out, the action on its part at first, up to October 20, was preparatory in nature, the British advancing in an attempt to turn the German right, and the Germans fighting delaying actions in order to gain time for reinforcements to come up. From the moment that Antwerp fell—on October 9—the Germans made every effort to push forward the

besieging force released towards the West, and to follow up the Belgian Field Army and the British detachment landed on the coast. They also, hastened to bring up from various parts of Germany certain new army corps which had been hastily raised and trained after the commencement of the war. Their object was first to reinforce their comparatively weak right wing north of La Bassée, which was being gradually pushed back by the enveloping British, and then, pivoted on that place, which was still in their hands, to assume the offensive in strength, drive the Allies out of Belgium, and break through to Dunkirk and Calais.

Of their new formations four corps reached the zone of operations comprised in the stretch of country from Lille to the sea between October 15 and 21; and these, with the troops which had been set free from Antwerp, together made up a force of some 250,000 fresh men. Other corps were also concentrated from different parts of the front, and eventually the Germans had, north of La Bassée, about 14 corps and eight cavalry divisions—that is, a force of three-quarters of a million men with which to attempt to drive the Allies into the sea. In addition, and this is most important, there was the immensely powerful armament of heavy siege artillery which had also been brought up from round Antwerp.

As is known, the first blow was delivered about October 17 along the coast, against our Allies round Nieuport and in the neighbourhood of Dixmude, both places being beyond the left of our line, which then had its left flank slightly to the north-east of Ypres. From that time up to the 28th a series of desperate attempts were made against the French and Belgians holding the line of the Yser, who resisted with the utmost determination and entire success. Shortly after these attacks commenced, on October 20, the enemy began also to press at different points along our front; and from that day up to November 17, or for nearly a month, he continued to deliver a succession of furious blows, the most violent of which were directed against Ypres. At the commencement of this period the Allies were very greatly outnumbered,

which fact enabled the Germans, in the execution of their offensive strategy, to mass greater strength than that possessed by the defence at any place selected for attack, or, in other words, at the place which for the moment was regarded as the decisive point.

To turn to the action of the British Army round Ypres: for practically a month it succeeded in holding its ground against these repeated onslaughts made by vastly superior forces. The action during this period can be divided into two phases, one lasting from October 20, when the Germans first assumed the offensive against us definitely, to November 2, and the other from the 3rd to the 17th of that month. Before these two phases are considered, however, it will be as well to define briefly in what manner the portion of the line most concerned, *i.e.*, that near Ypres, was held, so that some idea may be gained of the course of the operations in connection with locality. At first, when the German offensive started, the British held part of the re-entrant in the line to the north of the Ypres salient, the salient to the east of the town, and the re-entrant to the south of it. The German attacks in this quarter were of a double nature. Against the northern and southern re-entrants their immediate object was to cut off the defenders of the Ypres salient. Against the east of the salient, from the direction of Menin, their efforts were directed to drive the defenders straight westwards through the town.

During the first phase, from October 21 to 23, occurred the unsuccessful attack of the German XXIIIrd Corps against us in the neighbourhood of Bixschoote and that of the XXVIIth Corps from the neighbourhood of Becelaere against the British on the north of the Menin road, both of these corps being new formations. After these attacks the French relieved us of part of the front on the northern entrant. This phase culminated in the five days' desperate fighting on the east of Ypres, which lasted from October 29 till November 2, when the Germans attempted to capture the town by a direct blow westwards and penetration through the southern re-entrant.

This operation, as has previously been described, was

their great effort, heralded by numerous orders inciting the troops to do their utmost, preluded and supported by an intense concentrated artillery fire, and encouraged by the presence of the Emperor. The attack was made by five corps in all, and when first its full fury fell on us we were still holding a very extended front, in spite of the fact that the French had relieved us of a portion of it to the north and were co-operating most gallantly in the defence.

During this time our force—which consisted all along of the same units, be it noted—had to withstand an almost continuous bombardment and to meet one desperate assault after another, each carried out by fresh units drawn from the large number which the Germans were devoting to the operation.

On the 30th the French came to our assistance and took over a portion of our front on the southern re-entrant, thus relieving the pressure considerably: and on the succeeding days a continuous stream of French reinforcements arrived in this quarter and in the north of Ypres. Never was help more welcome, for by then our small local reserves had again and again been thrown into the fight in the execution of repeated counter-attacks, and our men were exhausted by incessant fighting.

It is an interesting fact that this timely relief should have been afforded us by our Allies within a few days of the 60th anniversary of that other occasion—at the battle of Inkerman—when the British Army welcomed a French force advancing to its assistance.

During the second phase in the struggle there was a renewal of the attacks, marked by the special effort made by the Prussian Guard on the 11th directly westwards against the salient, and that made by the XVth Corps on November 17 to force its way in by the southern re-entrant. The results of those attempts are known. On November 20 the thin khaki line in this quarter was finally relieved by the French, and our weary men vacated the battered trenches they had so gallantly held for a month.

This, then, is the modification of the rôle now being played by the British Army; its front has been considerably

shortened by the extent taken over by the French, and has in addition been reinforced. The lull in activity of about a week in the operations also has enabled us to readjust our forces, strengthen their position, and to bring up reserves. There has, therefore, been a great general improvement in the conditions under which we are carrying on the fight and the time has arrived when it becomes possible—for the first time—without danger of giving away information that might enlighten and encourage the enemy to refer to what our troops have done in one quarter of the small portion of the whole battle line which they have been holding, and to explain broadly why the stand made by them during the month after October 20, 1914, forms one of the most glorious chapters in our military history. Special attention is drawn to this quarter of our front because it was that most highly tried.

It may be that the story of that month will never be fully told. Many of those who could have supplied essential details are dead, and the nature of the fighting was such as to preclude any chance of careful records being kept. But it can be said that the dogged pluck of the troops and the individual acts of gallantry and devotion on the part of regimental officers and men again and again retrieved a situation that was at times critical: and that it has been due solely to their resource, initiative, and endurance that success has lain with us.

As the struggle swayed backwards and forwards through wood and hamlet the fighting assumed a most confused and desperate character. Units became inextricably mixed, and in many cases, in order to strengthen some threatened point or fill a gap in the line, officers had to collect and throw into the fight what men they could, regardless of the units to which they belonged. In one trench a subaltern was perhaps in charge of a detachment composed of Scotch, Irish, and English regiments. Here, a brigadier commanded a few companies. There, another has been in control of a division. One officer of that rank at one time had thirteen battalions under his command which were much below strength owing to casualties and the disintegration inseparable from hand-to-hand fighting.

Our casualties have been severe, but we have been fighting a battle, and a battle implies casualties. And heavy as they have been, it must be remembered that they have not been suffered in vain. The duty of the French, Belgians, and British in the Western theatre of operations has been to act as a containing force—in other words, to hold on to and to keep occupied as many of the enemy as possible whilst the Russians were attacking in the East. In this we have succeeded in playing our part, and by our resistance have contributed materially towards the success of the campaign.

Moreover, our losses have not impaired our fighting efficiency. The troops have required only a slight respite in order to be able to continue the action with as much determination as ever. They are physically fit and well fed, and have suffered merely from the fatigue inseparable from a protracted struggle such as they have been through. The severest handling by the enemy has never had more than a temporary effect on their spirits, which have soon recovered owing to the years of discipline and training to which officers and men have been accustomed.

The value of such preparation is as noticeable on the side of the enemy as on our own. The phenomenal losses suffered by the German new formations have been remarked, and they were in part due to their lack of training. Moreover, though at the first onset these formations advanced to the attack as bravely as their active corps, they have not by any means shown the same recuperative power. The XXVIIth Corps, for instance, which is a new formation composed principally of men with only from seven to twelve weeks' training, has not yet recovered from its first encounter with British infantry round Becelaere, to the north-east of Ypres, a month ago. On the other hand, the Guard Corps, in spite of having suffered severely in Belgium, of having been thrown headlong across the Oise at Guise, and of having lost large numbers on the plains of Champagne and on the banks of the Aisne, advanced against Ypres on November 11 as bravely as they did on August 20.

It is well that the services of those who lie dead on the

slopes and in the woods along the Franco-Belgian frontier should be realized, even though the realization of their performances must at present of necessity be imperfect. Theirs it has been to defend against tremendous odds a line that could only be maintained if they were prepared to undergo great sacrifices. And this they have done. But the fact that the situation has now been relieved is no reason for assuming that the enemy has abandoned his intention to press through to the sea; and the same task lies before the British Army of maintaining its share in the struggle until the nation in arms shall come to our support. The price already paid has been, and will doubtless be, great, but it will be paid ungrudgingly in the certainty that help will come before long.

What the Army has done cannot be better expressed than in the concluding words of a Special Order recently issued by the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief:—

I have made many calls upon you, and the answers you have made to them have covered you, your regiments, and the Army to which you belong with honour and glory.

Your fighting qualities, courage, and endurance have been subjected to the most trying and severe tests, and you have proved yourselves worthy descendants of the British soldiers of the past who have built up the magnificent traditions of the regiments to which you belong.

You have not only maintained those traditions, but you have materially added to their lustre.

It is impossible for me to find words in which to express my appreciation of the splendid services you have performed.

The Germans are, indeed, no unworthy foes. In spite of the strain of conducting a gigantic struggle on two fronts, they continue to attack with a courage which appears to be but little abated by failure. In this quarter they have not succeeded in gaining the Straits of Dover; but the new army which they put into the field in the middle of October has enabled them to consolidate their

position on this frontier, and to retain all but a very small portion of Belgium, including an important stretch of coast-line. Well as they have fought, however, it is doubtful if their achievements have been commensurate with their losses, which, as has been said, have recently been very largely due to the lack of training and comparative lack of discipline of the improvised units they have placed in the field. The qualification "comparative" is employed advisedly, for owing to the discipline to which every German is subjected from childhood, that of their new formations is probably greater than any that could be instilled into Englishmen of a similar class in similar circumstances. Nevertheless, the prospect of their ultimate defeat, certain as it seems to us, does not appear even yet to have dawned on them, nor will it do so until further great efforts and further great sacrifices have been made by the Allies.

This war is going to be one of exhaustion; and after the regular armies of the belligerents have done their work it will be upon the measures taken to prepare and utilize the raw material of the manhood of the countries concerned that final success will depend. This implies trained men—hundreds of thousands of trained and disciplined men.

November 29, 1914.

From the 26th to the 28th the weather has continued warm, and, except for an occasional heavy shower, has been fine. These three days have been productive of no incidents of any magnitude, and have, on the whole, been about the quietest we have experienced for weeks. The narrative of operations, therefore, can be dismissed in a very few words.

Though generally inactive along our front, the Germans have continued to press in one quarter—*i.e.*, against the Indian troops, where, in spite of the loss suffered by them in their last attack in this direction, they have been busy extending their saps in order to carry out assaults from short distances. None of these, however, has been carried out in great force. South of the Lys generally

there has been some shelling of localities in the rear of our front line; but this form of annoyance diminishes daily along our whole front. Sniping is carried on almost incessantly. There seems little doubt that the Germans are employing civilians, either willing or unwilling, to dig trenches, for some have been seen and shot while engaged in this work.

On Thursday, the 26th, there is nothing to record.

On the 27th the enemy succeeded, by means of sapping up and then assaulting from a short distance amidst a shower of bombs, in gaining possession of a portion of a trench on our right. From this, however, they were soon ejected.

On the 28th, facing our centre, there were signs of some change having been made in the composition of the hostile artillery, which was employed in "registering" fresh zones of fire. On the right one of the German batteries was discovered in the morning to have been left out in the open. This was probably due to the failure of an attempt to move it during the night. However, whatever the cause of its exposed position, our guns did not fail to take advantage of it. On the same day, though inactive against us, the Germans made an isolated and unsupported attack on the French on our left. They were easily beaten back, and, it is believed, lost some 400 killed and many prisoners.

While it is necessary to accept the evidence of all prisoners with caution, there is a change of tone in the views expressed by some of the officers recently captured which appears to be genuine. They admit the failure of German strategy and profess to take a gloomy view of the future. At the same time it must be confessed that there is as yet no sign that their view is that generally held by the enemy. Nor has there been any definite indication of a lack of *moral* amongst his troops.

During the last six weeks various mobilization orders calling up different classes of men liable to service have been issued by the French Government.

To the average Englishman, whom a life spent far removed from all that war implies is apt to render un-

imaginative, even the immediate effect of such orders is hard to conceive; and to him a journey made shortly after their issue along the highways of Northern France—or for that matter in any part of France—might have come as somewhat of a revelation. From the middle of October onwards the roads have been thronged with men—literally thousands being met with in the course of a short motor journey—all trudging along towards the mobilization centres, carrying their few clothes and necessaries in bags slung over their shoulders. Some have more, some less, but few are without the spare pair of boots which they apparently, and quite rightly, regard as the most necessary article of a soldier's outfit. "The Emperor fights his campaigns with our legs and not with our muskets," said the conscripts of Napoleon, and their descendants have evidently not forgotten the lesson. The strange procession includes a curious mixture of types. A considerable proportion consists of middle-aged men of good physique, broad-shouldered and sturdy, and of likely young men from the countryside, of a type to make excellent soldiers.

For some years, as is probably generally known, there have been no exemptions from military service in France. Educational standards, and professions, such as those of the actor, lawyer, doctor, and artist, which were formerly excepted, are now so no longer. But, besides those who escaped in the past, many others have now been gathered in the net of service, and have gone to swell the numbers of those who have recently been streaming along every road in France to answer to the call of their country.

The change that, within the last few days, has come over what may be termed the "atmosphere" of the battlefield is marked. As regards noise, the cannonade has now decreased to such an extent that for hours on end nothing is heard but the infrequent boom of one of the Allies' heavy guns, the occasional rattle of machine guns, and the intermittent "pop"—for that word expresses the sound best—of the snipers on either side. And in certain quarters, where the combatants are close

and operations appertain to those of siege warfare, the bombs of the *Minenwerfer*, and the smaller bombs thrown by hand, are detonating almost continuously. But the air no longer throbs to the continuously dull roar of heavy artillery and the detonating of great projectiles.

Of course, if an attack is in progress, there is again turmoil, but it is more local and does not approach in intensity that which recently reigned on a large scale. The scene as a whole, as viewed from one of the few commanding points in our front, is almost one of peace as compared with that of a week or two ago. The columns of black smoke vomited by the exploding howitzer shell are as rare as those from burning villages. The only generally visible signs of war are the occasional puffs of bursting shrapnel opening out above woods and villages and floating slowly away on the still air.

It was mentioned in the account of the fighting on the Aisne that, so far as we were concerned, the struggle had to some extent assumed the character of siege operations. The same can be said with still greater truth of the battle in which we are now engaged. Both sides have had time to dig themselves in and to strengthen their positions with all the resources available in the field. In spite of this, the Germans, urged by weighty motives, limited as to time, and confident in their numerical superiority and the weight of a very powerful siege armament—such as has, indeed, never before been brought into the field—have, when face to face with the Allies' line, attempted to break it by frontal attacks. Having failed in this, in spite of desperate efforts, they are now endeavouring in some quarters to progress by the slower methods of siege warfare.

Until recently they have attempted to gain ground by assaulting our position across the open, seizing what they can out of it, retaining and strengthening that, and using it as a starting-point for a fresh assault. Their aim is still the same—to gain ground and drive us back—but, owing to the immense loss entailed in the summary method of assaulting across the open for any distance, the means employed are modified. To shorten the space

over which their infantry has to advance they now move forward by several narrow end-on approaches, which are either open to the air or a foot or two below the surface of the ground. Where open, these approaches are zig-zagged to avoid being enfiladed. In either case forward progress is made by excavating at one end. At what is considered a possible assaulting distance, these approaches, or saps, are joined up by a lateral trench roughly parallel to that being attacked. Here the stormers collect for a fresh rush.

The extent to which subterranean or semi-underground life is forced on the combatants in the neighbourhood of the firing line varies with the nature of the ground and depends on the character of the enemy's activity in the particular locality in which they are. Where sniping or rifle fire is alone to be expected the amount of the excavations behind the front line is limited. When bombardment is, or has been, severe, everyone within range of the enemy's guns, the brigadier not excepted, will be found ensconced underground in "dug-outs," or "funk-holes," as they are familiarly called, for in the zone under fire houses are no better than shell traps.

Behind the firing-line trenches are found the shelters for the men holding the line and those for supports. These are more elaborate and comfortable than the fire trenches, usually are roofed over, and contain cooking-places and many conveniences. Some of these underground quarters have now become almost luxurious and contain windows. Communication between the firing line and the various shelters in rear and with the headquarters of units is kept up along approach trenches, all zig-zagged to prevent being enfiladed and liberally partitioned into compartments by traverses, so as to localize the effect of shell fire.

For some time the character of the artillery fire has been such as to force both combatants, even for some distance behind the firing line, to burrow into the earth in order to obtain shelter, and to conceal their works as far as possible in order to gain protection both from guns and aeroplanes.

This has been carried on to such an extent that behind the front fire trenches of British, French, and Germans are perfect labyrinths of burrows of various types. The principal feature of the battlefield, therefore, as has often been pointed out, is the absence of any signs of human beings.

Where resort is had to siege methods the earth-works on both sides become still more complicated, though there is a definite system underlying their apparent confusion. It is not possible to give any details of the methods upon which our trenches are arranged, but it is permissible to describe how the enemy is carrying on the close attack at some points.

From the last position attained they sap forward in the two ways already mentioned. The approaches are excavated by pioneers working at the head, the German pioneers being technically trained troops which correspond to our sappers. Owing to the close range at which the fighting is conducted and the fact that rifles fixed in rests and machine guns are kept permanently directed upon the crest of the trenches, observation is somewhat difficult; but the "head" or end of the approaching sap can be detected from the mound of earth which is thrown up. This cannot be done, however, where the advance is being conducted by a "blinded" sap. In executing this type of sap a horizontal bore-hole about a foot in diameter and some three or four feet below ground, is bored by means of a special earth borer worked by hand. It is then enlarged by pick and shovel into a small tunnel, whose roof is one or two feet below the surface.

Several of these saps having been driven forward, their heads are connected by a lateral trench, which becomes the front line and can be used for stormers to collect for an assault. In some cases, usually at night, a sap is driven right up to the parapet of the hostile trench, which is then blown in by a charge. Amidst the confusion caused, and a shower of grenades, the stormers attempt to burst in through the opening and work along the trench. They also assault it in front. As in their ordinary infantry attacks, machine guns are quickly

brought up to any point gained in order to repel counter-attack.

Most of this fighting takes place at such close range that the guns of either side cannot fire at the enemy's infantry without great risk of hitting its own men. The rôle of artillery projectiles, however, is well played by bombs of all descriptions, which are used in prodigious quantities.

The larger ones projected by the *Minenwerfer*, of which the Germans employ three sizes, correspond to the heavy howitzer shell of the distant combat, and have much the same effect. They have a distinctive nickname of their own, but they may be termed the "Jack Johnsons" of the close attack of siege warfare. The smaller bombs or grenades are thrown by hand from a few yards' distance, perhaps just lobbed over a parapet. They are charged with high explosive and detonate with great violence; and since their impetus does not cause them to bury themselves in the earth before they detonate, their action, though local, is very unpleasant in the enclosed space between two traverses in a trench.

These grenades of various types are being thrown continuously by both sides, every assault being preluded and accompanied by showers of them. In fact, the wholesale use of these murderous missiles is one of the most prominent features of the close attack now being carried on.

As may be imagined, what with sharpshooters, machine guns, and bombs, this kind of fighting is very deadly, and somewhat blind, owing to the difficulty of observation. The latter, however, is somewhat decreased by the use of the "hyperscope," which is much the same in principle as the periscope of a submarine, and allows a man to look over the top of a parapet without raising his head above it.

December 2, 1914.

The uneventfulness of affairs on our front continues, as does the mild weather.

On Sunday, the 29th, the enemy in front of the right of our line kept up their efforts to throw bombs into our

trenches. Unpleasant as this sometimes is, our troops have, strange to say, on occasion been able to extract amusement from it. The other day, in the rush to get away from one of these missiles, two men fell over each other, one actually sitting down on the bomb. It exploded. When the smoke cleared away the man was discovered to have escaped with very slight injuries to himself, but his trousers were torn to shreds, to the great amusement of his comrades, who greeted the incident with shouts of laughter. Shortly afterwards another soldier, in trying to escape round a traverse in a hurry, sat down on a bomb, which, however, failed to detonate. This game of bomb-throwing, however, is not confined to one side, as the Germans could testify.

On our left the French made progress both north and south of Ypres and captured some German trenches.

On Monday, the 30th, the Germans displayed a little more activity along our line, and on our extreme left, as well as south of the Lys, there was a decided increase of artillery fire. On the left two of their guns were caught in the open by our artillery as they were apparently changing position under cover of a rainstorm. One was knocked out and the other was abandoned. In this part of the field also occurred one of those strange incidents which are not uncommon in fighting at close quarters. An infantry officer who walked up to a German trench found all its occupants asleep. As a memento of his visit he carried off a bayonet.

In the centre we gained some minor local successes. A party of the enemy which had started to excavate a new trench within sight was immediately driven out by our artillery; a house used by their snipers was blown up; and a patrol from one of our Territorial battalions successfully rounded up a hostile patrol, making two prisoners. At other points along this part of the front the enemy has now begun to use rifle grenades freely. These incidents are of the most insignificant character, and have no bearing on the operations, but it is in a succession of such small actions that the periods of inactivity on a grand scale are passed.

Beyond our left the French again advanced slightly, and captured a German trench.

On Tuesday, December 1, there is nothing in the way of military operations to record.

It is reported, on what is believed to be good authority, that the Germans have renamed Ostend, and that the railway station is now placarded with the name "Kales." The only possible object of such a manœuvre, if it has indeed been carried out, would appear to be to encourage the soldiers who are brought from distant parts in absolute ignorance of what has really been happening. That this action is not so futile as it may seem is shown by the fact that many of our prisoners are still convinced that both Calais and Paris are in the hands of the Germans.

The course taken by the German operations round Ypres, ending in bombardment, has been such as to suggest that the destruction of the place is really the outcome of disappointment and exasperation at its resistance and at the failure of the much-advertised plans for its capture.

Up till the end of October the town had not been bombarded as a whole, the shells which had fallen in it being obviously directed at points where our headquarters were believed to be situated and at one or two others, such as the railway station, where destruction would have some military value. The shelling of the town itself only began in earnest on the night of November 5, since when it has been maintained intermittently. That the town escaped so long was apparently due to the fact that up till the 5th the Germans counted on capturing it and did not wish to cause damage. Hopes of doing so were no doubt still held after that date, as is evinced by the continuation of the attacks, notably that of the 11th by the Prussian Guard. But these later attempts to take the place seem rather to have been of the nature of "forlorn hopes," which called for all the assistance that could be obtained by artillery co-operation, even at the risk of the destruction of an historic place which might become German; and considerable advantage was certainly to be

gained by concentrating fire on a place where roads met and which must be a focus of traffic.

On these military grounds the initial bombardment can to a certain extent be justified, though it is doubtful whether the results achieved were commensurate with the expenditure of ammunition involved. And its object could have been attained equally well if the German artillery had concentrated on the points where the roads, of which there are not many, issue from the town, and it did not entail the employment of incendiary shell. But the subsequent conduct of the enemy denotes a desire for senseless destruction.

The last attack in force was delivered on November 17. Four days later, on the 22nd, the Germans commenced to pour a stream of shell into the central market square; and whereas the Cloth Hall and Cathedral had both escaped material damage up till then, these two historic buildings were blazing fiercely by 3 p.m. It is stated that in order to do this the Germans brought up a train armed with heavy guns, which were used under the direction of a captive balloon. The bombardment was continued until the evening of the 23rd. The reason to which is ascribed this wanton destruction has already been stated, but in case there should be any doubts as to the justice of the indictment, it must be stated that so soon as the Cloth Hall and the Cathedral had been obviously demolished, fire was no longer directed on those buildings. In the words of a French *communiqué*, which will also be the verdict of history:—"This magnificent old city was condemned to death on the day when the Emperor was forced to renounce the hope of making an entry into it."

The recent connexion of the British Army with the city is in reality an old one renewed. Ypres was one of the barrier fortresses against France for the defence of which we were bound by the "Barrier Treaty" made in 1715 to provide garrisons amounting to 10,000 men. All but 200 years have passed since then, but the old ramparts are still there, looking down upon the French and British soldiers who have jointly maintained the proud title of the old fortress against another foe.

December 6, 1914.

In the situation of the British Army no fresh development has occurred during the last four days. To the south of the Lys, Wednesday, December 2, passed quite uneventfully, though the enemy's artillery displayed more activity than it has recently been showing, while to the north of the river we destroyed an observation station by our howitzer fire. On our right centre a successful reconnaissance was made at night.

Beyond our flanks, as has already been made public on our right the French captured the Château of Vermelles and some trenches, while on our left they discovered that their field artillery had destroyed a German heavy gun and two ammunition wagons the day before.

On the next day there was a great deal of rain, but no incident along our whole front. It was found, however, that a minor expedition against a German sap-head made on the night of November 27-28 had been more successful than was realized at the time, having resulted in a loss of between 40 and 50 to the enemy at an expense of 13 casualties to us.

On Friday, the 4th, another German observation station in front of our right centre was destroyed by our guns. Otherwise nothing more than the usual artillery fire, sniping, and bomb throwing occurred, the latter more especially on our right. There was again much rain. Beyond our right the French made further progress at Vermelles, capturing a certain amount of war material, including a machine gun and ammunition, and on our left they captured a village near Langemarck.

Saturday, the 5th, brought another week of the war to a close on a miserable day of almost continuous rain and high wind.

During these four days the most important event for the British Army has been the visit of His Majesty the King. His Majesty's stay at General Headquarters luckily coincided with a period of inactivity, which enabled far more of the troops at the front to welcome him than might otherwise have been the case.

Of major tactical operations by the British Forces there.

has recently been an entire absence, and there has therefore been no definite progress to record of a material nature such as might be achieved by inflicting defeat and severe loss on the enemy. Nor for some seven weeks has any strategical advantage been won in the geographical sense, since there has been no advance nor gain of ground. But there is another kind of strategic progress, more imponderable, less direct, and less obvious than the two mentioned—namely, that produced by the lapse of time—when time is working against one side—every day tends to make it stronger, and active resistance on its part tends to force the enemy to misapplication of force which might be employed to greater advantage elsewhere. In this direction, as has been so clearly pointed out by the Commander-in-Chief in his latest despatch, the stationary attitude of the army has not been sterile. Acting as the Allies are, every day passed has co-operated towards the desired result. This contributory strategy, as it may be termed, however, useful though it is, is monotonous, unexciting and bereft of incidents on a large enough scale to provide interesting reading. It does not, therefore, lend itself to description. All that can be done is to point out what is happening.

It is proverbial that Allies fall out. But it is also proverbial that the exception proves the rule, and if that be true, the rule has certainly been established during the four months' duration of this war. There could be no more cordial relations than those existing between the French and British, both in their official and social life. In all the towns, large or small, in which the British Army has been quartered the friendliness with which the inhabitants have received us is more than remarkable; and it would be difficult to say in how many French houses British officers and men have now been billeted, or how many have been converted into military offices. In many cases the houses are empty, save possibly for a caretaker, in others the owners and their families, or portions of their families, are still inhabiting one part of their homes, while the British are occupying another—usually, be it noted, the better part. And, at best—

even in the absolute upheaval of life which occurs in an invaded country—this incursion of strangers of another race must be intensely inconvenient.

One reason for the cordiality, or possibly, the good-humoured resignation, with which our French hosts receive us is as they say with a smile, "*Nous préférons, Monsieur, que vous soyez ici que les Allemands.*" This is the sentiment that is always at the back of their minds, and the nearer the place in which they live to the high-water mark of the German invasion, the more fervently is it expressed. Indeed it is absolutely impossible for those in England to realize the feelings and fears of the people out here who have either once had the loathed invader in occupation of their homes, even when the latter have done no special damage, or who live in some place which by the merest chance the Germans have not entered.

This is quite apart from those instances in which towns have been destroyed and the enemy has taken what he considered rigorous measures. Even in those hard cases where it is necessary to turn the inhabitants out of their houses in order to demolish them so as to clear a field of fire the resignation and courtesy met with are astonishing. The reasons given for this drastic action are at once appreciated and the usual comment made is, "Ah, well! It is a small matter compared to the war." Such is the temper and mental attitude of the majority towards the war and their British Allies.

There is no doubt, also, that our troops have never forgotten, and have by the treatment they have received never been allowed to forget for a moment, that they are in a friendly and allied country; and they have returned courtesy and good feeling in kind. Indeed, it is somewhat of a revelation to see how freely our soldiers mix with the population, and how the members of both nationalities get on with the smallest knowledge of the other's language. And a very pleasing side of the joint operations of the Allies is the fact that there has never been any sort of friction between the troops. This appears all the more remarkable when it is remembered how many

thousands of men have been thrown together, often in most trying circumstances, and that wine is the common drink of the country.

If it does nothing more, this war is bound to increase the mutual knowledge of and respect for each other of the French and British, and there is no doubt that it will leave a lasting and beneficial effect on the intercourse of the two nations. The same may be said of the relations between the Belgians and British; but their connexion has been neither so extensive nor so prolonged.

It has been stated in some of the British papers that the Germans have taken Domremy-la-Pucelle. This report is entirely incorrect, for the Germans have never been near that place; and it is likely to cause pain and annoyance to our Allies, since Domremy-la-Pucelle was the birthplace of Joan of Arc, and is a point of national and religious interest.

December 10, 1914.

For the 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th December the operations of the army have been of the same character as for the past three weeks.

The tale of minor events is as follows:--On Sunday, the 6th, on our right our howitzers obtained direct hits on two German gun emplacements, whilst other guns shelled some of the enemy's trenches with good effect. There are grounds for believing that in this portion of our front the activity of our infantry in sniping, backed up by the fire of our artillery and the ingenuity of the Sappers in devising new methods of causing annoyance, has rendered the enemy somewhat uneasy, the quiet of the nights being continually broken by spasmodic outbursts of musketry from the German trenches and the frequent firing of star shell. These precautionary outbursts, however, are perhaps not altogether unjustified, for Gurkhas are unpleasant enemies on dark nights, and in many places the trenches of the Indians and the Germans are only a few yards apart. In this quarter a bombardment of the German trenches was carried out during the day, but the effect is not known. In the

centre one of our battalions took an opportunity of opening fire on a German working party and caused considerable loss. Evidence of spying on the part of civilians was obtained on this day. A man in plain clothes was observed in the hostile trenches pointing out our positions. A German aviator dropped six bombs on Hazebrouck with little effect.

Since it has been so frequently stated that our howitzers have obtained "direct hits" on the enemy's gun emplacements, perhaps it is as well to explain what this means in terms of damage done to the enemy. In the most unfavourable case to us it means that one of our shells charged with many pounds of lyddite and fitted with a percussion fuse has detonated on the parapet of an emplacement. The result would be that a number of the detachment might be killed or wounded, but that the gun would probably not be seriously damaged. In the most favourable case it would mean that the shell has detonated in the emplacement itself or actually on the gun or its mounting. This would almost certainly imply the destruction of both gun and detachment.

On Monday, the 7th, there was very heavy rain. The Germans fired rifle grenades for the first time against the trenches in the centre of our line. Our artillery, however, soon put a stop to this innovation. On the right and left nothing occurred worthy of special notice.

On Tuesday two German field guns were put out of action by our artillery. Our guns also set fire to a railway station and some rolling stock, and destroyed a chimney used by the enemy for observation. Otherwise nothing occurred. It rained during a part of the day.

Of Wednesday, the 9th, the only item to record is that opposite the left of our line the enemy was heard to be cheering. This may have been due to the receipt of the German official version of the battle of Lodz. Over the low-lying ground it was very foggy in the evening.

The weather has been very wet and much warmer during the last four days. There has also been a high wind during most of this period, but our aviators have succeeded in making several valuable reconnaissances.

In spite of the absence of serious active operations, considerable progress has been made in generally improving our situation. The number of communication trenches has been increased, the drainage and heating of fire and living trenches have been arranged, the organization of the supply and transport services has been brought to a higher pitch of efficiency, and everything is being prepared to meet the winter campaign before us. As an instance of some of the refinements of active service to which we are being introduced it may be mentioned that the men in certain front-line trenches have been regaling themselves by listening on the telephone to a gramophone concert eight miles away.

That knowledge is power and that to be forewarned is to be forearmed are matters of proverbial philosophy, and in no sphere of human activity do they apply with greater force than in the conduct of war. In a military sense knowledge implies almost entirely an accurate acquaintance with facts concerning the enemy; where he is, what strength he is in, what he is doing—in a word, all that confers the ability to gauge the hostile general's strength and weakness and to divine his intentions and his power to carry them into effect. To a greater or less degree it forms the basis of all action taken. Indeed, Wellington is reported to have said that he owed his success to the fact that he was always wondering what "the other fellow was doing on the other side of the hill."

Nearly all the knowledge of this nature required by a commander in the field can be included in the term "intelligence"; and to its collection and analysis is devoted a special branch of the General Staff of an army.

There are various ways of acquiring intelligence which are universally practised. They are broadly—reconnaissance, whether it be by cavalry, infantry, or both, by motor cycle, or aircraft; the employment of spies, or, as they are more pleasantly called, "agents"; and the collection of such information as can be gained from an inspection of the uniforms worn by the dead or by prisoners, and from the papers carried by or the cross-examination of the latter. In these methods there is a

certain amount of overlapping, but this does not entail such a waste of time and energy as might appear, for it is only by some overlap that can be obtained that corroboration of isolated pieces of information which enables decisions to be made and action to be taken with some reasonable chance of success. All methods, however, whether positively or negatively, by direct or devious ways, by the observation and record of major or minor facts, work towards the sum of knowledge.

The employment of agents is on occasion the most wholesale way in which intelligence can be gained, and at its best it furnishes a broader basis upon which to build than the others. The work of such persons does not always depend on the accuracy of vision of an individual, which is a very variable quality, but is often established on statements of facts produced with the greatest care by the enemy for his own use. On the other hand, it is absolutely dependent on the *bona fides* of a class which is universally looked upon with distrust and on the ability of an individual to discriminate between what is true and what may be fiction purposely arranged for his benefit. It is a slow method, the transmission of the news gained being of necessity mostly effected through devious channels. It is also unreliable as to the quantity and frequency of the information furnished, for though the collection of the latter is not much affected by the weather, it depends on factors which are not under the control of the agent or his employers.

Reconnaissance is the most direct and probably the quickest way of obtaining news of the enemy. It is not uniform, however, in amount or quality, because it generally depends on the quickness of eye and power of appreciation of some scout or observer watching from a distance; and it is liable to be interrupted or affected by atmospheric conditions.

Lastly comes the third method mentioned. If a prisoner gives away information either through stupidity or from a desire to curry favour and to better his lot a good deal may be attained at one bound. But this applies chiefly to the information given by officers, who are not

very often captured, and are, moreover, not in the habit of imparting valuable news. A soldier's knowledge of what is going on on his own side is comparatively limited. Communications from prisoners, also, are to be accepted with reserve. In the direction of identification the activity of an Intelligence Section is largely confined to the examination of the badges or equipment worn by the dead and by prisoners. The personality of the individual of course has no military value, but the identity discs and effects of the dead are carefully guarded for eventual return to their Government. The examination of letters, diaries, and orders also claims a great deal of attention. Newspapers are rarely of value, because no sane Government allows current details of the nature sought to be published by the Press. On the other hand, soldiers' diaries and letters are often indiscreet in the extreme, for the writers, in describing the physical condition of the men often unwittingly betray the state of their *moral*, and in recording their impressions of the effect produced by the enemy's rifle fire, or the havoc wrought by his artillery, quite innocently give away valuable information as to where the shoe pinches.

Since the composition of the larger formations of all armies is known, it is possible, except in those cases where sweeping changes are made during a war, to extract vital information from the connexion of even a single soldier killed or captured at a certain spot with a certain battalion. The result of ascertaining that this battalion was at that point at a given time may lead to the first suspicion that a much larger formation to which that battalion belongs is not somewhere else where its presence has been assumed. The possible significance of the results of such a discovery when corroborated is obvious. This explains why the identification of units with localities by means of accoutrements, badges, etc., takes so much of the time of certain bureaus in all armies. As it has been flippantly, but by no means inaccurately, expressed, an important part of the duty of a great General Staff is that of constituting army corps out of shoulder-straps.

During the war the air is full of rumours even at General Headquarters, and when these rumours are concerned with the dispositions of the enemy their scope is much enlarged if the hostile army is composed of forces of different nationalities. On the other hand, it is not only the connexion of units with localities that is useful. It often happens that the mere presence of a unit being in the field betrays the fact that reinforcements have come up or that new formations are being raised, for, inaccurate as knowledge of the enemy may be, it is generally sufficient for the original organization of his army to be known.

As is seen, a considerable part of intelligence work is synthetic in character and amounts to the building up first of a possible and then of a probable theory based on a mass of suspicions, facts which merely amount to side-lights, and established evidence. It resembles that of a detective or the framer of a jig-saw puzzle. No small clue or seemingly irrelevant fact can be neglected. It is often an apparently useless scrap of information that fits in and forms the final link in a chain of evidence.

It is obvious, apart from discussion as to causes and results, however, that if all this trouble is actually taken to identify individuals, whether in connexion with places or not, it must be considered worth doing. And it follows that it must be worth while to put every obstacle in the way of the enemy doing the same. That this view is held is proved by the pains at which all the combatants in the present war are to prevent reference in the Press to units in the field. This reticence is not maintained in order to deny to the general public news which would quite naturally and rightly be of absorbing interest, but in order not to give gratis to the enemy information he needs and to acquire which—if it is not presented to him—he is forced to spend much money and trouble.

Is it better to help the nation in its struggle for existence by an admittedly tantalizing reticence, or to satisfy the people's curiosity and natural anxiety at the risk of endangering national success in the field? This is the question. To it there can be only one answer.

A further and natural step beyond this negative policy of withholding from the enemy the knowledge of where troops are is the more active course of inducing him to suppose that they are in localities remote from their actual situation. This, of course, appertains to the art of mystifying, misleading, and surprising the enemy which is so valuable a part of the conduct of war, and reference may be made to what possibly was an example of its existence on a grand scale in recent war, *i.e.*, that between Russia and Japan.

Before and during the commencement of the battle of Mukden the great unknown factor to the Russians was the direction in which Marshal Oyama would throw into the fight the weight of General Nogi's Third Army, then on its way up from Port Arthur. Its action was bound to have a great influence on the battle. It is true that the creation of the new Japanese Fifth Army away on the east was also somewhat of a mystery to the Russians, but its existence had been discovered and it had been located approximately. As is known, the Japanese Commander intended to employ the bulk of the Third Army in a sudden blow in great strength on the west against the Russian right. To assist in this scheme he detached a portion of the Third Army to act with the Fifth on his right, which combined force was to open the action by an attack in the east calculated to cause the Russians to transfer strength to that quarter and so away from the quarter where the Japanese main stroke was to fall. The ruse succeeded, and it is believed that its success was largely due to the fact that the fraction of General Nogi's troops on the east purposely advertised their presence with the Fifth Army.

Similarly, reports of an intended invasion of England may be spread by the enemy in the hope of causing a dislocation of plans of which full advantage can be taken. Such a course would only be in accordance with the action of the Germans in 1870, when they spread abroad rumours that there were large concentrations of their troops in the Black Forest—where there were practically none—in order to induce the French to detain forces in Southern Alsace

Misleading reports of this nature are usually set in circulation by those interested and spread either by their dupes, honest people who are purposely allowed to overhear carefully-arranged conversations held for their benefit; by means of *espions doubles*, or agents in the pay of both sides; by common traitors willing to sell their own nation; or by men working patriotically for their own country who have an intimate acquaintance with the enemy nation. As an example of this may be mentioned the presence at the capital of a neutral country of a German officer who was for some years stationed in London and has an intimate knowledge of our naval, military, political, and social life, and has probably made such a deep study of our national psychology that he would be well equipped to play on our idiosyncrasies.

December 13, 1914.

In the particular sense of the word already defined the situation has remained "uneventful" for yet another four days.

On the night of the 9th-10th the enemy made a demonstration against our centre, but did not press an attack. On the same night one shot was fired after dark by one of our heavy howitzers at a village in front of our left, which is believed to be a busy centre of the enemy. It was discovered next morning from our infantry holding the trenches that there had been an explosion some way behind the enemy's front line during the night, which had caused great commotion amongst the Germans in the trenches. The news of the destruction of the *Schnarnhorst*, *Gneisenau*, and *Leipzig* reached the troops on the morning of the 10th, and caused great satisfaction.

As had been the case after the loss of the *Emden*, the kindly thought of keeping the German Army posted as to the doings of the sister service was carried into effect on this occasion by wrapping a written message round a brickbat, which was then hurled towards the German trenches by the best thrower of the cricket ball on the spot. The result of this attention is not known. The

information, with the addition of the news of the sinking of the *Nürnberg*, was also given to the Germans by means of a notice-board next day.

Beyond our left the French recaptured some trenches taken from them on the 9th, and made some prisoners.

On Friday, the 11th, long-range sniping was the only activity to claim attention. On Saturday the enemy's guns were rather more active against our left, but otherwise nothing occurred worthy of record. Action on Sunday, the 13th, was of a similar character, the enemy's artillery paying more attention to our left.

To our left, on the 12th, the French repulsed three German attacks, inflicting severe punishment. The Germans withdrew from the left bank of the Yser Canal.

The weather has, on the whole, been rainy and very windy, though Saturday was one of the finest days we have had for some time. Over large areas also the clouds have hung as low as 400ft. Since the German anti-aircraft guns make fairly accurate shooting up to a vertical range of 8,000 ft., to say nothing of the rifle and machine-gun fire, it can be appreciated that the conditions have not been ideal for aerial reconnaissance.

On the other hand, a low-lying layer of clouds may not be such a disadvantage to errands of destruction. It may be thick enough to prevent the observation and identification of comparatively small objects, such as those whose presence it is usually sought to discover, but not to hide the features of the country, such as towns, villages, and rivers, and so prevent an airman orienting himself by sight. When this is so he can fly above the cloud bank until he arrives over the point which he wishes to attack and then drop his bombs unseen from below, or he can descend and drop them from a lower altitude. It is easier to discern large objects on the ground through cloud than it is for those below to see an aeroplane through the same medium. The moral effect of "bolts from the blue" or, rather, from the blank grey, is somewhat greater than when the destroyer is actually seen.

In the matter of sniping the Germans, thorough as

always, are well prepared. Some of their sharpshooters are armed with rifles having telescopic sights and are equipped with small bullet-proof shields, the latter being painted in cubist patterns in futurist colours in order to obtain concealment by confusion. Success in this somewhat murderous form of warfare is largely a matter of position and luck; but it is remarkable what can be done by pains and skill. At some points, where we are fortunate in having some exceptionally good shots who are also keen on this work, we have established a mastery over the German sharpshooters which enables our men to leave their trenches, whilst the occupants of the German front line dare not show a head above the parapet. It would be interesting to explain exactly how this result has been achieved, but the time for such disclosures has not yet arrived.

On the lighter side—that of camp yarns—the following story of Gallic humour is causing much amusement and is at any rate *ben trovato*. At one point not far from our own line where the French and German trenches are sufficiently close together for the occupants to converse the French recently asked the “Bosches” where the Emperor was. The answer was that the Germans did not know, whereupon the French replied that their President was actually going to visit them in the trenches. “When?” was the eager inquiry. “Oh, to-morrow, somewhere about midday,” was the equally innocent answer. About the appointed time, to the strains of the “Marseillaise” played on a gramophone, a top-hat on a stick was slowly marched down the trench so as occasionally to show above the parapet. The waste of German ammunition which took place is described as colossal.

VIII

A CERTAIN LIVELINESS

December 17, 1914.

There is now some definite action on our front to report. In conjunction with the French, who are also pressing, a forward movement has been started which has resulted in a small gain of ground.

On the night of the 13th-14th, to the south of the Lys, some of the Indian troops rushed two German sap-heads and gained possession of them. On Monday, the 14th, on our right, the artillery of both sides was kept employed, our guns taking the greater share in the action, and there was rifle fire all along the line. It was on the left that a somewhat more important operation was initiated. Here, after a bombardment of a section of the German position, our infantry pushed forward at a point to the west of Wytschaete. We captured some sections of trench at a loss to the enemy of 120 killed and two officers and 60 men taken prisoners. Beyond our left the Germans were also forced back some distance along the line running between St. Eloi, to the south-east of Ypres and Zonnebeke, to the north of the Ypres-Menin road. North of Ypres the Germans also withdrew at certain points. That night the enemy fired 250 shells into Armentières.

Next day, Tuesday, there was no advance made by either side. To the north of the Lys our artillery action continued, and our infantry maintained the gain in ground made the day before. On our immediate left the French were opposed by a stubborn resistance and made no further progress. During the night, near Givenchy, an assault was carried out in three bodies against the

German saps. Two of these attacks were successful, and our troops retained possession of a certain length of each sap. In the centre a minor attack against a German trench was also successful. Beyond our right the French gained some ground.

On Wednesday, the 16th, the Germans started what looked like an advance in force against our right, but it did not develop; and in the centre sapping operations alone occupied each side. On our left we maintained the ground won on the 14th, and to the north of us the French made some progress, capturing some 400 yards of trench on the north of the Menin Road from which we were driven by the Prussian Guard on October 11.

On Thursday, the 17th, nothing happened on our right, but it was noticeable that the enemy showed signs of being in expectation of an attack by manning his fire trenches in force. In the centre sapping continued, and some of our heavy guns obtained several hits upon a German howitzer battery and what appeared to be a headquarters. On our left our action was confined to that of the artillery, the infantry not advancing beyond the line they had gained on the 14th. In this quarter of the field two German soldiers who had crawled out of their trenches to throw hand-grenades were both blown up by a premature burst of one of these missiles.

Beyond our left, up in the north, a German counter-attack on the night of the 16th-17th near Lombaertzyde was repulsed, and the Germans were slowly forced back east and south of Nieuport and lost about 100 sailors and marines, captured by the French.

From a prisoner captured on the 14th it has been ascertained that both the 23rd Regiment and Jägers suffered enormous losses on November 4. The same man described November 5 as a "terrible day," and mentions that he had never before seen such mud as that in which the Germans were operating, and that the troops were suffering very much from the water in the trenches. The shelling that he went through on the 14th of this month he states to have exceeded all his previous experience.

We have reason to believe from the evidence of prisoners that many of the Landwehr are heartily sick of the war and resent the harsh treatment of their officers. They have been persuaded that the British ill-treat their prisoners, and but for this some would be willing to surrender.

The Germans appear to be discarding their helmets, the *Pickelhauben* with which they have for 50 years been associated in the eyes of the world. Also, probably for purposes of concealment, they are covering the red bands of their forage caps with strips of grey cloth. Many variations in their uniforms are now to be seen, some of the troops wearing their peace clothing, which is of brighter colour than the grey service dress. There is evidence that certain of the units facing us are much under strength.

The opposition now being encountered resembles to some extent that met with by us in the beginning of October, when we first reached the Franco-Belgian frontier and before the Germans brought up their full force and assumed the offensive. It has one great difference, however, and that is that the enemy is in much greater force and his positions are much stronger and better organized than they were two months ago. Then an advance by either side implied movement across enclosed and very difficult country—as it does still—and for us it meant the attack of skilfully but hastily fortified strong points or villages held to a large extent by cavalry and Jägers, with a large proportion of machine guns.

What we have in front of us to-day is no longer a succession of isolated points. There still are such points, and some are the same, but they are stronger and form part of a practically continuous defensive zone, consisting in some places of several lines of cunningly sited and carefully constructed works. This zone really amounts to a maze of fire trenches and obstacles. Every known form of obstacle is used, the entanglements—to select the most common—varying from loose coils of wire to securely staked networks of from 18in. to nearly 6ft. in height and of different widths.

These measures of defence are only such as are to be expected from troops who are well trained and have ample resources and time. And there are, of course, ways in which they can be overcome. But, where these methods are applied, the rate of advance is necessarily slow, and when it is reported in laconic terms that ground has been gained at a certain point, topographically the gain may amount to only a few yards. Tactically, on the other hand, the progress implied by even such a small step forward may be important, for a trench, a cluster of trenches, the edge of a wood, a building, a village, or a knoll, may have been reached, the possession of which will facilitate further operations.

Siege approaches, such as saps, help the attacker to advance under cover and so to minimize loss, but they do not and cannot obviate liability to surprise receptions of the nature indicated when once the enemy's works are gained. The only certain method of preventing this is by a prolonged bombardment with high explosive shell till trenches, mines, and machine guns are reduced to scrap heaps, or to mine under them and blow them into the air.

December 21, 1914.

The activity on our part which commenced on December 14 in conjunction with the pressure brought to bear by our Allies along the whole line has continued. On Friday, the 18th, on our right centre we made progress, capturing some sap-heads and 25 prisoners. Many dead Germans were found by us, presumably killed by our artillery fire. On our left a heavy bombardment was directed by us against the German trenches in that area. Our guns had got the range to a nicety, and must have inflicted considerable damage, every section of this portion of the enemy's line being subjected to bursts of concentrated fire. In the centre our infantry executed some most gallant attacks. They were successful in driving the enemy from his fire trenches, but they could not hold the latter when captured, and retired to their former positions. But there was a net gain of ground at

different points along the whole front. Both to the north and south of us the French continued to gain ground and took many prisoners and several machine guns.

During the night of the 18th and early hours of the 19th on our right three lengths of trenches and two machine guns were taken by us and an extent of ground was gained varying from 300 to 500 yards. The enemy, however, counter-attacked on the morning of the 19th and forced us to evacuate a portion of the position we had won. Some heavy fighting then ensued, the Germans making determined efforts to regain all the ground they had lost. By weight of numbers they succeeded so far that on the morning of the 20th only two sap-heads remained in our hands.

On the 19th, on our left centre, we were successful in regaining certain defended houses and trenches. On the left the bombardment was maintained as on the previous day.

On Sunday, the 20th, the Germans made an effort to check the general progress of the Allied offensive by a counter-attack on a considerable front against our right and the left of the French acting to the south of us. During the morning they advanced against our line in some strength, and though suffering heavy losses succeeded by about midday in gaining temporary possession of some of our advanced trenches. But in the afternoon our troops, returning to the charge, retook a village which the enemy had just occupied and some of the neighbouring trenches. By the early morning of Monday, the 21st, the greater part of our line had been restored. Meanwhile, in our centre, on Sunday, the enemy, perhaps with a view to supporting the operation against our right, demonstrated with artillery and trench mortars, but did not launch any infantry assault. In our centre we gained one more house from the enemy, destroyed another, and consolidated our foothold at this point. On our left our guns alone took part in the action.

After one of our attacks made on the 18th in the centre of the line there occurred an innovation in our relations with the enemy. A kind of armistice was concluded in

order to permit of the burying of the dead on both sides.

Of the recent action the employment of bombs has undoubtedly been the chief feature. Indeed, the throwing of large bombs from trench mortars and of similar smaller missiles or grenades from rifles or by hand has now become general all along the line. As has been stated, when the fighting reaches the stage of trench warfare at short range—as it has now done over a front of very many miles—these missiles take the place of the projectiles of longer range weapons, which cannot be used with safety owing to the propinquity to each other of the front lines of either side. The great use made by the Germans of these engines of destruction is only one more sign of the reliance they place upon every possible means of helping their infantry.

An artillery bombardment of the enemy's positions—such as has recently been carried out—viewed from the high ground on our left is a most impressive sight. After a short burst of fire lasting perhaps for only three or four minutes the hostile trenches are obscured by a pall of smoke, in the midst of which can be seen the flashes of the shrapnel bursts and the miniature volcanoes of earth where the high-explosive common shells burst in the soft clay soil. Then, if an infantry attack is to be launched the cannonade suddenly ceases, there is a moment of suspense, and a swarm of khaki figures springs from our trenches and rushes across the fire-swept zone of possibly a hundred yards in breadth. Instantly there breaks out the rattle of machine guns and musketry. There is some hesitation as the stormers reach the entanglement; and then, if the assault succeeds, they disappear into the enemy's trenches, leaving a few or many scattered bodies lying in the track of their advance. Save at such moments as these there is often no movement whatever in the battle zone, for not a man, horse, or gun is to be seen. And there are periods of absolute stillness when, except for the sight of the deserted and ruined hamlets, the scene is one of peace and agricultural prosperity.

The mere recapitulation of results attained conveys so

little idea of the system of control by which the operations are directed that a superficial description of the chain of command may not be out of place. In that rather vague area known as "the front," omitting the "bases," "advanced bases," and lines of communication lying behind, the first and most important point for consideration is the General Headquarters of the Army, where is located the directing brain, and the driving force of the Army as a whole. G.H.Q., as it is usually called, is generally in some centrally situated town which may be within sound of the enemy's guns but not within their reach, and at it are installed the Commander-in-Chief and the General Staff of the Army. That a commander can afford to be so far away from the front is due to the fact that he no longer has to, or can, depend on personal observation for information upon which to base action. He relies entirely on second or third hand evidence of things seen or heard by others over a front of many miles and communicated back by the agency of electricity or petrol. Messages sent in by telegraph, wireless, telephones, motor-cars, motor cycles, and aeroplanes are the daily food of the General Staff, for the handling of this mass of material collected by others, its analysis, and its application to the situation for the purpose of framing plans are their work. At the Headquarters of the Army, as at those of corps, divisions, and brigades, a great part of this work is done by means of maps. Here, in certain offices, may be seen large tables spread with maps, upon which every movement of both sides is carefully recorded in flags or coloured chalks, as news is received from the various sources of information available. At this centre also are the heads of the administrative branches and departments of the Army, which deal with discipline, supplies of all sorts, transport of every nature, the transmission of information, and the medical services. Naturally, all the people concerned in this work are billeted in houses, and unless the town has been previously in the occupation of the enemy, the life of the inhabitants outwardly goes on almost normally.

As the Army moves backwards or forwards, General

Headquarters is transferred from one place to another, but it is always maintained at such a distance from the fighting line that it is not disturbed by the operations or influenced by what is going on in one part of the front to the detriment of other parts. Nevertheless, for the purpose of the more immediate control and direction of operations, the Commander-in-Chief has one or more central posts nearer the front, at which he can more conveniently meet his subordinate commanders for consultation, and to which the latter can more quickly send reports or their representatives. These are called *postes de commandement*, or report centres. Touch is maintained daily between General Headquarters, Corps Headquarters, and the General and Corps Headquarters of the Allies by means of special *liaison* officers, who travel to and fro by motor. They can convey personally the wishes of those authorities whom they connect and, knowing the views of both, can, if necessary, verbally amplify written communications.

Behind their respective corps and some way in front of General Headquarters, but also generally in a town and far enough from the firing line to be immune from the turmoil of the fighting, are the Corps Headquarters. These are replicas on a smaller scale—suitable to the requirements and lesser size of a corps—of General Headquarters. At them, as may be supposed, are stationed the corps commanders and their staffs. These commanders also are kept in touch with each other by *liaison* officers and have their *postes de commandement*.

Again, a step farther down the military hierarchy and still closer to the front come Divisional Headquarters. These are pushed as far forward as is compatible with comparative immunity from hostile artillery fire. With heavy howitzers or guns in the field complete immunity is unobtainable at the distance from the front at which it is desirable for divisional commanders to exercise control. Here in this neighbourhood are to be found the first visible signs that fighting is going on. These do not consist so much in the ruined houses and devastated villages, which are rather proofs of past fighting, and may

be in evidence even behind General Headquarters, but consist paradoxically enough in the actual absence of any traces of the presence of masses of soldiers, for though the area from here onwards may contain thousands of troops, all cavalry, artillery, and infantry will alike be so hidden away in villages, in woods, or in folds of the ground that there will be no trace of them in the landscape. This is one result of the all-pervading and all-seeing aeroplane. On the roads, however, at this distance from the firing line the transport will be moving freely.

Yet another stage farther towards the fighting line are the brigade headquarters. The brigadier, with his staff, may be in a house, when he can get one in a conveniently situated village where his dwelling place will be inconspicuous amongst the other buildings, but it is as likely that his office will be in an underground dug-out—roofed with earth and well hidden, for the area in which he lives and moves is liable to be swept at any time by a hail of shells, to say nothing of the rifle bullets which are constant visitors. In this district there are even less traces of military occupation than farther back, since a greater proportion of the occupants are below ground and the movement of transport by day is more limited. Nevertheless, even as far up as this, the population can be seen continuing their usual avocations—ploughing, sowing, or reaping as the case may be.

Still farther on, some 400 or 500 yards from brigade headquarters, lies the belt of country in which hide the supports and actual firing line. In this will be found the battalion commanders. Seamed with dug-outs, burrows, trenches, and excavations of every kind, and fitted with craters, it is bounded on the front by a long discontinuous irregular line fringed with barbed wire and broken by saps wriggling still more to the front. This is the Ultima Thule. Beyond, of width varying according to the nature of the fighting and of the ground, is neutral territory, the No-man's-land between the hostile forces. It is strewn with the dead of both sides, some lying, others caught and propped in the sagging wire, where they may have been for days, still others half buried in craters or destroyed para-

pets. When darkness falls, with infinite caution, an occasional patrol or solitary sniper may explore this gruesome area, crawling amongst the *débris*—possibly of many fights—over the dead bodies and the inequalities of the ground till some point of vantage is gained whence the enemy's position can be examined or a good shot obtained. On the other side of this zone of the unburied dead bristles a similar fringe of wire and a long succession of low mounds and parapets—the position of the enemy. And woe betide the man who in daylight puts up his head carelessly to take a long glance at it.

From General Headquarters, miles behind, *viâ* divisional, brigade, and battalion headquarters, to the officer or man in the observation post in front of the firing line there is a long trail of wire. For the first part of the distance it is carried on permanent telegraph posts, next on the slender black and white military posts, then it may be looped from tree to tree or along the hedges, and, finally, it lies half hidden in the mud at the roadside. But it serves to convey the orders of the commander to the points where his wishes are ultimately translated into action.

December 21, 1914.

As regards our right, where heavy fighting took place on Sunday, it will be remembered that in this quarter the greater part of our line had been restored by the early morning of Monday the 21st. On that day the action was continued with determination by both sides. Our efforts were chiefly directed to lessening a small gap which still existed in the centre of this section of our front, and as reinforcements were thrown into the fight, the Germans were gradually driven from the trenches they were holding. During the afternoon they made a fresh effort, endeavouring to work round the flanks of the troops holding a village. Here a most gallant and stubborn defence was made by our men under a very severe fire directed on them from three sides at once, but their position finally became so precarious that a retirement was ordered.

The enemy's success was, however, short-lived. Re-

inforcements arrived, stormed the village, and established themselves firmly in the trenches round it. In this action the French co-operated and gave us the most valuable assistance.

The fighting on this afternoon and during the night took place in a perfect hurricane of driving rain and sleet. Night brought no cessation of the desperate struggle, and the enemy's searchlights and flares lit up the darkness. Friend and foe were now fighting at close quarters in such a maze of trenches running in all directions that it was difficult to distinguish the position of the one from the other.

On the rest of our front nothing of importance took place. Our trenches in the centre and left were more heavily shelled than they had been for some days, while on the right centre the area behind our front line was searched by the hostile artillery, which appears to have been reinforced to some extent. In the centre we continued to consolidate the position won on the 19th. At one point our guns replied with considerable effect against some German working parties.

The French continued their pressure to the north and south of us and achieved substantial gains.

On Tuesday, the 22nd, all interest continued to be centred on the right. In the early morning the troops in the village which we had recovered the night before, who had been fighting all night, advanced and seized a line of trenches held by the Germans. This position, however, was found to be too exposed, and a retirement to the original line was carried out, and our hold on the village still more firmly secured. The fighting in this quarter took place over ground which was literally a quagmire, the trenches being full of water. A fresh attack in strength developed by the Germans against two villages in the centre of this section, and from one our troops were driven back. During the night the line was re-established.

By Wednesday, the 23rd, it was evident that the force of the attack against our right had spent itself, for no further advance was made by the enemy, who must have

suffered severe loss during the previous three days. Along the rest of our line, also, there was no activity. A thick mist militated against air reconnaissance and artillery action.

On Thursday, the 24th, nothing of importance occurred along our front. On the right, both sides confined themselves to bombardment with mortars and hand-grenades.

The Belgians and French between the British Army and the sea made progress at several points.

It would appear from the evidence of prisoners that the strength of many of the German units in our front is still much reduced; some companies muster only 150 men, and there is seldom more than one officer per company.

Though the weather has been generally unfavourable to aviation, several reconnaissances have been made during the past week, and there have been three encounters in the air between British and German aeroplanes, as a result of which the hostile machine has in each case been forced to go down in the German lines. On one occasion our machine chased a Taube, and having attained the favourable position for shooting, the observer emptied his automatic pistol at the enemy without any visible result at about 150ft. range. He then proceeded to take a photograph, and the appearance of the camera seems to have alarmed the German airman, who at once fled.

Upon another occasion a somewhat difficult situation arose when a bomb which was being dropped caught in a string and remained suspended three or four feet below the aeroplane. There was no way of reaching the bomb, and it was impossible to land. Finally the observer kicked a hole through the floor of the fusilage, hooked the string with his foot and shook it until the bomb fell off.

Two stories are current concerning our neighbours the French which illustrate the spirit that animates all ranks. One is that of a private who, when carrying a dispatch, inadvertently came upon a trench containing 50 Germans. With extraordinary presence of mind he summoned them to surrender. Thinking that he must be the leader of a

considerable force following close behind him, the Germans held up their hands. He then shouted to some of his comrades, who were in a neighbouring trench at some distance, to advance, and the Germans were all made prisoners.

The second story is that of a certain famous French regiment which had been fighting incessantly for some days, gaining a little ground every day until it had worked its way close to the main trench held by the enemy on its front. It was then this regiment's turn to be relieved. But its members sent a request on behalf of all the officers and men that they should be permitted to stay one day longer and thus gain the glory of driving the enemy from his position.

The country on our right where the fighting of the last few days has been proceeding has already been described as it appeared during our first advance, some weeks ago. A great deal of this area is flat and at all times marshy, and is now almost impassable in places. Some of the villages round Béthune have suffered heavily from shell fire. The factories and coalfields are, of course, deserted, and it is difficult to imagine anything—except possibly the flooded area nearer the coast—which more suggests "the abomination of desolation" than this whole district as seen through fog and driving snow. The great pyramidal slag-heaps stand out amid the smoke-blackened ruins of mining villages and the swamped fields intersected by dykes and fringed with rows of pollard willows.

There is no sign of the ordinary life of the place save the few inhabitants who are living in destitution and misery under incessant shell fire, 'mid the wreckage of bricks and mortar which was once their home. Everywhere, as far as the eye can see, there is nothing but trenches, ruins, mud.

The mud of Poland is proverbial, but it is hard to believe that the difficulties produced by it are greater than those at present being experienced by both sides in some parts of our front. This applies especially to any advance over the low-lying areas which, besides being cut up by ditches, are water-logged and in some places pitted

with shell craters full of water. Under such conditions, also, the construction of entrenchments is no easy matter. The clay is so tenacious that it will not leave the shovel, which has continually to be scraped, while in the wettest places the soil is so liquid that parapets slide down into shapeless masses as soon as they are thrown up, and the sides of an excavation continually cave in.

It is reported that in one place the mud is so bad that in a recent action between the French and the Germans neither side could fire their rifles, and clubbed them, or fought with shovels and pickaxes.

IX

CHRISTMAS IN THE TRENCHES

December 28, 1914.

Christmas has come and gone, but it has brought no modification of the situation. There has, however, been a change in the weather, which is, perhaps, a matter of greater importance to the hundreds of thousands of men living in the open than is at first realized. It has become much colder.

On Christmas Eve a hard frost set in, and December 25 was very cold, though it was not bright, for a mist hung over the countryside. On our right, which has been the scene of the most recent action, we captured a short length of German trench. It was also discovered that a group of buildings behind the German front line was being used as headquarters of some sort. The fire of a certain number of batteries was therefore concentrated on the spot, the buildings being first shelled with lyddite, and then the ground all round being searched with shrapnel. It is believed that this bombardment was effective. Fifty dead Germans were picked up in one of the trenches recently re-taken by us. It is estimated that in the attack on the village captured by them on the 21st their loss in killed alone must have amounted to 400. In our centre the only incident was the capture of two of the enemy who came across to our trenches uninvited, ostensibly to wish us the Compliments of the Season.

Boxing Day was quiet except for some shelling by the enemy of a few points near our left. It was a day of mingled frost, sleet, and then rain.

On Sunday, the 27th, nothing occurred. There were periods of heavy rain.

On Christmas Day every officer and man in the field received two most acceptable gifts. From the King and Queen came a card. On one side of this were portraits of their Majesties, the King being in khaki field service dress, and on the other side was a greeting in facsimile of the King's handwriting:—"With our best wishes for Christmas, 1914. May God protect you and bring you home safe. Mary R., George R.I." The inscription on the special card for the sick and wounded ended with the words:—"May you soon be restored to health."

From her Royal Highness Princess Mary's Soldiers' and Sailors' Christmas Fund came a present. This varied according as the recipient was a smoker or a non-smoker, and also varied for some of the Indian troops. For the smokers it consisted of the following:—A briar pipe and a small gilt casket containing photo of Princess Mary, a card with the inscription:—"With best wishes for a Happy Christmas and a Victorious New Year from Princess Mary and friends at home," an ounce of tobacco, and a packet of cigarettes. Embossed on the cover of the box is a portrait medallion of the Royal donor, with the superscriptions *Imperium Britannicum*, "Christmas, 1914," and the names of our six Allies—France, Russia, Belgium, Serbia, Montenegro, Japan. In quarters, in the trenches, and in the hospitals these tokens of the kindly thought of Their Majesties gave the most intense pleasure. In fact, the eagerness shown by some of the wounded to receive their presents was almost pathetic, and many soldiers have written personal letters of thanks to Their Majesties. The Indian troops exhibited their boxes with an undisguised pride and glee, which showed how these prizes would be treasured and handed down as heirlooms.

As can be imagined, the distribution of this number of parcels in addition to the immense amount of warm clothing and other gifts for the troops was no easy task. But the organization of the Transport, the Supply, and the Railway Services was sufficient to cope with the problem. All the Christmas traffic was handled by means of a special staff, with officers stationed at the bases and railheads. Elaborate precautions were taken to prevent

any loss *en route* of the presents of the Princess Mary's Fund. They were conveyed in closed vans locked by letter-locks, of which the key-word was known only to certain officers. Some of the vans were also tied up with barbed wire. This great precaution nearly led to disaster in one case. The receiving officer had either forgotten or not received the opening word, "Noel," and could not get the van open until he hauled at the fastening with a motor-lorry. In regard to the King and Queen's cards the chief difficulty surmounted was to ensure delivery on one day to units scattered at bases, at advanced bases, on the lines of communication, and in the trenches. Many units, also, were actually moving.

A certain amount has been said about the hardships under which the troops are fighting, which are, of course, mostly incidental to the conduct of a winter campaign. On the other hand, everything possible has been done to mitigate the rigours of active service under such conditions. The troops are fed as no army in the field has been fed before. Both from public and private sources they are furnished with every imaginable kind of garment. Materially, our soldiers want for nothing which it is possible to give them in the circumstances. Morally, they are in very good heart and contented. But there is one thing which nearly all of them refer to when asked, and that is the lack of means of making a "cheerful noise," or, in other words, the dearth of mouth-organs! When the men are collected in the burrows and dug-outs behind the firing line in the long, dull evenings when nothing happens any musical instrument for the performance of a solo or the accompaniment of a song is a godsend.

It will probably be gratifying to the thousands of kind-hearted people at home who have sent out luxuries for the soldiers to learn that there was no lack of Christmas fare for them. At every regimental headquarters could be seen piles of plum puddings, chocolate, tobacco, and other luxuries. Of Christmas puddings alone over 80 tons reached the different railheads between December 24 and 26. The men who came from their turn of duty in

the trenches, weary, sodden with water, and chilled to the bone were soon sitting down in their billets to eat their dinners with greater relish than if they had been in barracks at home.

It is wonderful what effect a little rest and warmth and a change of clothes has in enabling the men to recover from the exposure and strain of life in the trenches. One night with a roof over their heads and near a stove fire, and they are again fit for anything. They suffer most in their feet, which are apt to swell after much standing in mud and water, but they soon recover once they have taken off their boots and put on a dry pair of socks. Certain means are now being taken to give protection against the wet. These precautions enable a good deal of damp and cold to be endured, and the proof of their success is the small amount of sickness even in such weather as we have recently experienced.

The country immediately in rear of the fighting line has a strange life of its own. In the low-lying district south of the Lys there is an extraordinary number of isolated farmhouses and small clusters of cottages, rather than villages, dotted thickly all over the flat expanse of ploughed fields. Except where the shelling has been very severe the inhabitants remain, till the soil, and live side by side with our soldiers, who take up every yard of spare space in all the buildings, leaving the inhabitants just so much accommodation as they absolutely require.

The large square farmhouses are most useful for billeting purposes. These are generally built round a courtyard, in the centre of which, in defiance of all laws of sanitation, is a square pit for the midden. On this the windows of the living rooms look out. The first thing our men do on taking over is to start "swabbing"—to use a barrack-room term; and they then settle down to a life of comparative ease amid the pigs, the chickens, and the children, until their turn comes again to man the trenches. When they come off duty again a hot meal is ready for them, dry blankets are served out, and they settle down to sleep round the stoves in the houses.

An incident occurred on December 24 which was not mentioned in the last Summary of Events. It resulted in a slight loss of ground to us, but was the cause of, heavy casualties on the enemy. A mine was exploded by the Germans underneath one of our trenches on the right of the line and several yards of the trench were blown in. Under cover of this the German snipers advanced, occupied the part of our line that had been destroyed and enfiladed the rest. When this party of the enemy had established itself, a larger body advanced to the attack. Meanwhile our guns had been notified and opened with deadly effect, scattering the enemy and killing a large number. They then proceeded to bombard the part of the trench that had been captured and are believed to have killed all those that had got into it.

The following letter from Germany is of some interest as showing the economic conditions prevailing in one part of that country. It is from Lintfort, and is dated November 16.—

“Flour is fearfully expensive, and potatoes also. Everything is dear in Lintfort; one can hardly buy anything. Petroleum is also very scarce, every week only one litre, and then people must stand all along the street with jugs, and the last ones don't get any.”

December 31, 1914.

Monday, the 28th, was a day of pelting rain. Towards evening this gave place to a hurricane of wind, followed, during the night, by a violent thunderstorm. No incident worth chronicling occurred along our line, neither the weather nor the waterlogged condition of the ground favouring military operations in the low-lying areas; but the French continued to make progress in other quarters, and, among other successes, captured the village of St. Georges, east of Nieuport, and inflicted great loss on the enemy.

On Tuesday, the 29th, our troops on the right recovered by a gradual advance much of the ground that had been occupied by the enemy the week before.

On Wednesday, the 30th, the gradual progress on our

right was maintained. The Germans again bombarded Armentières and shelled our front line on the left. To our north, their airmen displayed more activity than they had lately shown, dropping bombs on Dunkirk and Furnes. The day was bright and frosty, favouring aerial reconnaissance. .

The last day of 1914 passed equally uneventfully all along our front.

The fighting is now taking place over ground where both sides have for weeks past been excavating in all directions, until it has become a perfect labyrinth. A trench runs straight for a considerable distance, then it suddenly forks in three or four directions. One branch merely leads into a ditch full of water, used in drier weather as a means of communication; another ends abruptly in a *cul-de-sac*, probably an abandoned saphead; the third winds on, leading into galleries and passages farther forward.

Sometimes, where new ground is broken, the spade turns up the long-buried dead, ghastly relics of former fights, and on all sides the surface of the earth is ploughed and furrowed by fragments of shell and bombs and distorted by mines. Seen from a distance, this apparently confused mass of passages crossing and recrossing one another resembles a huge irregular gridiron.

The life led by the infantry of both sides at close quarters is a strange, cramped existence, with death always near, either by means of some missile from above or some mine exploded from beneath; a life which has one dull, monotonous background of mud and water.

Even when there is but little fighting the troops are kept hard at work strengthening the existing defences and constructing others, improvising the shelter which is imperative in such weather, and improving the sanitary conditions and communications of the trenches.

Many of the roads leading up, and parallel to, the Allied front present a kaleidoscope of the strangest contrasts. Several types of humanity can be seen, from the wild Arab horseman of the North African deserts, clothed in flowing robes of blue and scarlet, to the tribesman from

the mountains of the North-West Frontier of India. And there is something grotesquely incongruous in the appearance of the dusky faces and Oriental garments—such as those worn by the Algerian cavalry—amidst the surroundings of driving sleet, seas of mud, and long squalid rows of brick cottages such as those in the small industrial towns where many of these troops are billeted.

French Cuirassiers on the march, looking as if they had stepped straight out of one of Meissonier's pictures, their cuirasses red with rust, give an old-world touch to the scene and an impression of a time when war still had the glamour of romance. But the impression is quickly shattered by the drab reality of a convoy of motor-lorries, lumbering and snorting along beside little mule-drawn Indian ammunition carts bumping along, with the native drivers huddled up to the eyes in great-coats.

A British Territorial Battalion just out from home swings through a village, where it is surveyed by a mixed contingent of Gurkhas, Sikhs, and Baluchis, whose heads, as is the way with the native of India in cold weather, are wrapped in every conceivable form of headgear, even newspapers.

In some of the villages there is a Red Cross flag, marking the dressing station of a unit, to which at times the wounded may be seen being brought, and from which the motor-ambulances move away in the evening with their daily toll of sufferers. As it grows darker there is more visible activity in the area near the front: the regimental transport moves up, batteries change position, and the roads become crowded with troops and vehicles. And threading their way through the throng come the columns of men from the trenches, men covered with mud, cold, wet, and very weary, but still cheerful, talking and smoking as they march by.

That the German sniper, however bold and enterprising in picking off individuals who may come within range, does not always come off best when confronted by the British soldier at close quarters is proved by the following incident which occurred a few days ago. One of our men had gone at night into some farm buildings to

get some straw for a dug-out, when a shot was fired at him and two German soldiers suddenly appeared out of the darkness. He was unarmed, but at once produced a pair of wire-cutters, took aim as if with a revolver, and shouted to the Germans to put up their hands. This they did, and were then marched off as prisoners.

The employment of grenades is no new feature of field operations, as witness the name "Grenadiers"; and grenade-throwing as a drill was regularly practised in our Army until less than 30 years ago, when it was abandoned. It was revived, however, during the recent Balkan War, when the Komitadji bands habitually made use of this weapon. For siege warfare, of course, the employment of hand-grenades has never been abandoned, and at Port Arthur the Russians and Japanese expended thousands of these missiles, mostly improvised.

Some of those now being used by the Germans are of "sealed pattern," made in an arsenal probably before the war, whilst others have been manufactured in the field.

One pattern of the factory-made article consists of a cast-iron globe of about four inches in diameter and 1½ lb. weight when loaded. Its external surface is scored by deep latitudinal and longitudinal grooves, which form lines of cleavage for the metal to fly into a number of fragments of a size likely to cause damage. It is loaded with powder, which is exploded by slow-burning compound, fired by a friction tube before the bomb is thrown. Of the improvised type two patterns consist of differing amounts of high explosive, wired or otherwise made fast to a rough wooden throwing-handle, shaped something like a lady's hand-mirror. These are also fired by a detonator and fuse, the latter being ignited by a percussion lighter before the grenade is thrown.

Of the smaller trench mortars the bombs are thin metal cylinders weighing from about 4 to 18 lb. when loaded with high explosive and a charge of scrap-iron. These, again, are fired by fuse and detonator.

That we have effective means of replying to these missiles goes without saying.

Some of the prisoners we have captured lately have taken a gloomy view of the situation, have criticized their leaders, and appear utterly sick of the life they have been leading in the trenches. * But this probably is not a fair indication of the sentiments of the enemy's fighting troops. They are conscious that the war will last much longer than was at first expected, but the fact that it is being waged almost entirely in the enemy's country prevents them realizing that they are fighting in what must eventually prove a losing cause.

They believe firmly that Russia has suffered a decisive defeat—indeed, it is reported that on December 18 in Ghent all the bells were pealed to celebrate a victory over the Russians and the capture of 500,000 Russian prisoners; that France is exhausted and ready to make peace; that England is decadent, and that her people are engrossed in football matches. This idea is due apparently to the fact that we are still relying on what appears to them a half-measure, such as voluntary service, and are not, like other nations, enrolling the whole of our manhood for the prosecution of the war.

Their view is further distorted by lies circulated as to the attitude of neutrals who are said to have declared war on the Allies. Neither the pinch of real want nor lack of men and material of war has yet been felt by the Germans, nor has the consciousness of defeat yet been brought home to them, while their Press is doing its best to inspire them with a fanatical hatred against us, born of the conviction that it is we, inspired by jealousy, who have by intrigue and treachery raised a host of enemies against them.

January 4, 1915.

In the last summary of events it was stated that December 31 had passed uneventfully. This was, however, incorrect, for late on that evening some sharp fighting occurred on our right. A small post close to the La Bassée Canal was seized by the Germans and shortly after retaken by our troops. The Germans, however, again attacked during the night and captured it. Our troops

then made a second counter-attack, regaining possession of the ground and advancing beyond the original front. This advanced position was, however, found to be untenable, and the final result of the fighting was that our line in this quarter was reorganized, the particular post which had been the bone of contention being occupied by neither side. This fighting continued during the early hours of January 1. Our casualties, considering the nature of the action, were not severe.

During New Year's Day our guns in the right centre of our line shelled the German trenches with success and are believed to have inflicted considerable damage.

During Saturday and Sunday, January 2 and 3, the enemy's artillery displayed more activity than usual, devoting their attention on the first day to our left and on the second to our centre and right. On the third a German mortar was located opposite our right and was silenced by our guns.

On the evening of this day a very brilliant little affair took place on our right centre. About 8 p.m. a party consisting of one officer and 25 men attacked a German trench, surprised the sentries before they could give the alarm, and bayoneted the occupants of the trench, 20 men in all, who were overpowered before they had time to make any resistance. We only sustained three casualties.

During the last three days the weather, although milder, has continued very wet, aggravating the hardships of the men in the trenches.

The River Lys is flooded for a great part of its course, and in some places both sides have had to evacuate their trenches, for the Germans are suffering no less than ourselves from this cause. The wet clay is so adhesive that even the stoutest of boots will sometimes give way under the strain. In order to keep as dry as possible many of the men go barefoot down the long communication trenches, and only put on their boots and socks when in the better-drained fire trenches.

Even when active operations are not in progress life in the fighting line is not so monotonous as might be sup-

posed, for not only is continual work required to keep the trenches dry and to prevent the earth in places from falling in, but there is daily and nightly work of a more exciting nature. There is the continual effort on each side to gain the mastery in sniping, in sapping, and in bombardment by trench mortars and hand-grenades, there is the construction and repair of barbed wire entanglements, the digging of trenches by night within close range of the enemy's sentries, and the carrying of messages by day over open ground swept by fire. All this calls as much for qualities of enterprise, coolness, endurance, and devotion as any other form of warfare. The importance of establishing a superiority in the methods required by trench warfare does not lie only in the material results, but in the moral ascendancy which superior weapons and greater skill gain for the side which possesses them. The Germans attach great value to all such forms of annoyance, and particularly to sniping, as is shown by their lavish distribution of Iron Crosses to sharpshooters; but our men are not slow to repay them in their own coin, and even when no ground is being gained by either side a ceaseless struggle is being carried on to gain this ascendancy.

There has probably never been a war which has presented sharper contrasts of comfort and discomfort. A life which is one perpetual struggle against cold, mud, water, and high explosive is necessarily one of hardships and suffering, in spite of the cheerful endurance with which it is borne, but the sudden change from these surroundings to the security and comfort of warm billets, hot meals, and plenty of straw for bedding where, for all the signs of war, one might be 100 miles from the firing line, has introduced a new feature, and to the newcomer is a never-failing surprise.

Among the points in which we may fairly claim a superiority over the Germans is that of clothing. Most of our prisoners express the greatest admiration of the excellence of our clothing, which appears to be considerably better in quality and warmer than theirs.

It would appear that there is a good deal of sickness

in the enemy's ranks. There have been for some time past a considerable number of cases of typhoid, and some units have even been withdrawn temporarily owing to this cause.

It is reported that the enemy has formed certain units called "Feldbataillons," which are maintained behind the front and to which recruits of the 1914 class are sent to be trained.

German companies now consist of a mixture of active soldiers, Landwehr, Landsturm, Ersatz reservists, and volunteers. These latter are considered to be very inferior. Many of the Landwehr have been kept back until now in order to work in the mines and in other industries.

The strain that is being placed upon the enemy by the war is shown by an announcement in the Bavarian Press that on and after January 2 the military training institution is prepared to receive volunteers between the ages of 16 and 16 years 9 months, height not to be under 5ft. 3in.

The New Year has opened upon a more favourable situation for the Allies than any they have known since the commencement of the campaign. So far as the British are concerned, the small Expeditionary Force of four divisions which took the field last August has now swelled into a great Army which is steadily increasing in numbers, has become inured to war, and can look back on a record of hard fighting such as British troops have seldom sustained in the past.

The struggle of the last four months has passed through three distinct phases, and has now entered upon a fourth. The first phase was represented by the great outflanking advance of the Germans and the retirement of the Allies, the second by our advance to the Aisne, and the third by the gradual extension northwards on both sides to the North Sea, followed by the desperate attacks of the enemy on the northern portion of the Allied line.

During all that time neither side obtained a decisive victory, but each was striving to obtain that necessary preliminary to victory which consists in gaining the initiative—that is, in one adversary forcing the other to

conform to his movements and subordinate his actions to those of his antagonist.

In surveying the course of the struggle in the Western theatre, it is sometimes difficult to say which side has been at any given moment in this favourable position. The Germans certainly possessed the initiative during the first phase, and lost it in the second, while during the third they regained it by dint of greatly superior numbers massed against one section of our line. From the third week in October till about the middle of November the contest took the form of an attempt on the part of the enemy to break the Allied line and gain the ports of Calais and Dunkirk, and, on our part, to prevent that attempt. In its essence, therefore, our immediate object at that time was a negative one, although, regarding the war as a whole, the part then played by the French and British in the retention of large forces of the enemy in this theatre of war was a supremely important factor in achieving a positive object.

Since that time, however, a slow but none the less marked change has taken place, resulting in the definite passing of the initiative into the hands of the Allies. The contest has thus entered upon a fourth phase. This is not shown so much by the material results obtained, although at most points of the Allied front ground has been gained, and at some very marked progress, resulting in the capture of guns and strongly entrenched positions, has been made; but our advantage lies in the fact that it is now the Allies who for the past few weeks have assumed and maintained an offensive *rôle*, while the enemy has been acting on the defensive. In order to understand what this implies it is necessary to bear in mind that the operations in the Western theatre must be viewed as a whole, and that progress must be judged by the sum total of results along the whole line and not on any section of it where, owing to local conditions, the state of the country, or some other consideration, a forward movement may have been temporarily suspended.

The fact also that the enemy is acting on the defensive does not mean that he has given up attacking altogether,

as the strong attacks delivered against the British on December 19 and 20, as well as against various sections of the French line at different times, sufficiently witness; but these have all been in the nature of counter-attacks undertaken either in order to regain ground previously lost or to relieve the pressure on some other part of the German line. It is only by balancing the total results of these attacks on both sides, one against the other, and by understanding the difference of the motives inspiring them, that a clear idea can be obtained of the really marked progress achieved by the Allies. The German defensive is an active one. It is founded on the axiom of war that the weaker a force is and the more hardly it is pressed, the more persistently should it attack, but it remains true that such action is none the less essentially defensive, even though here and there one of their counter-attacks may succeed in regaining possession of a trench or in driving back a small section of our front.

It has frequently been pointed out that the present form of warfare is neither more nor less than siege operations on a gigantic scale, and that progress in such operations cannot be measured by the standard of field operations, but the importance of such progress as is now being made lies in two factors, one being moral, the other material. If we retain the initiative, it will mean that the German soldier will gradually become increasingly conscious that he is no longer marching on Calais or Paris, that instead of pressing forward his rôle is merely to maintain what has already been won, and that even this limited object is not being attained. Hitherto he has continually been told that reinforcements are about to arrive, and that an advance in force is imminent, while reports of startling victories by land and sea are disseminated broadcast in the ranks. But such fabrications can no longer carry any conviction when the troops realize that instead of attacking, they are stationary or even retiring, and the *moral* of the enemy must inevitably become affected. The more thoroughly they are now deceived as to their true position, the greater will be the disillusionment if they realize that ultimate victory is

unattainable, while upon an army such as that of the Germans, which has been taught to exalt the cult of the offensive almost into a fetish, the mere consciousness of being reduced to act on the defensive must have a most discouraging effect.

The other factor is the material advantage in cumulative effect of a continued advance, however slow. The capture of some village, hill, or line of trenches may not be a great feat in itself, but it may enable the attackers to bring up their guns to a more favourable position, to entlade some area, and so render it untenable, or to direct fire on the enemy's communications. The final consequence of repeated small successes such as these may be that the enemy is forced to abandon, strategically or tactically, important points, such as towns, railway junctions, and river crossings, and fall back to another line of defence altogether.

The effect of such a success will depend on the direction of the attack, on the extent to which it threatens the enemy's communications, and the extent of territory which on that account it compels him to abandon.

It must not, however, be thought that this is other than a very slow and laborious progress, or that this result is within immediate reach; yet every capture by the Allies of a trench represents a loss of ground for which the enemy has expended much blood and treasure, and is a step forward in the process of attrition which will eventually bring the war to an end.

In order to find any parallel to the general features of such warfare as is now being waged it is necessary to go back to the days when nations sought to defend their territories by continuous lines of entrenchments or fortifications. There have been instances of this, both in ancient history, such as the Great Wall of China and the Roman Wall in Britain, and also in modern times. Curiously enough, the very part of Flanders where the British Army is now operating was, in the early 18th century, defended by such continuous lines of fortifications, the famous so-called "Ne plus ultra" lines designed by Vauban and consisting of an elaborate system of dykes,

canals, and entrenchments stretching across the low-lying valleys of the Scheldt, Scarpe, and Lys to the sea. The method of overcoming such resistance does not differ in principle from that employed in those days. There is first the careful selection of the most suitable points for attack, the preparation by bombardment, the advance by sap and parallel, the organization of assaulting columns, and the minute preparations made for establishing a foothold in each successive outwork as a *point d'appui* for a further advance on the main line of works. It is such operations as these which are being carried out on a front of some 360 miles, and it is only by bearing in mind the limitations necessarily imposed by such warfare that the Allied progress at this stage can be estimated.

January 8, 1915.

During the last four days the weather has been warm, but still continues rainy, the rainfall during the last few weeks having been altogether exceptional even for Flanders.

Some further details are now to hand of the extremely well-planned and dashing attack carried out on the 3rd inst. which was referred to in the last summary, when a party of 25 men under an officer rushed a German trench and bayoneted 20 of the enemy. The trench was a sap-head which had been lengthened to admit of its being held by about 25 men. It was therefore an isolated post in advance of the enemy's main line. The party advanced across some 200 yards of open ground and crept up to within a few paces of the sentries.

The night favoured the enterprise, for it was pitch dark and raining; the sentries heard nothing and saw nothing until our men had crowned the parapet and were already in the trench. Not a shot was fired from first to last, and the work was done in grim silence with cold steel. Moreover, it was done thoroughly. Having cleared the trench, our men dug through several yards of earth which separated it from a ditch full of water, and, having drained the water into the trench and thus

rendered it untenable for the Germans, withdrew with a loss of only three of their number to their own lines.

On Monday, January 4, the enemy's artillery, which during the previous two days had maintained a vigorous bombardment on various sections of our line, was a good deal less active, although there was some heavy shelling on our left.

Our artillery on the right was especially successful. An explosion was observed in the enemy's lines south of La Bassée, caused either by the blowing up of an ammunition wagon, or possibly of a magazine, by one of our shells. A hostile battery was also silenced to the north-east of that place.

During the day sounds of pumping were heard in the enemy's trenches opposite our centre, and it is thought that they may be using pumps to drain the trenches, worked by electricity from the electric power station at Lille. In some places the Germans have recently been discovered attempting to pump water from their trenches into ours, but this, owing to the flat nature of the ground, has been singularly unsuccessful. The problem of how best to get rid of the water is one which is engaging the attention of both sides.

Muddy water has been found difficult to pump, but this difficulty is being overcome. Continual baling and pumping are required.

On Tuesday, the 5th, the cannonade was again more brisk. Our left was shelled heavily, though with extremely little result. Among other points the village of Neuve Eglise was selected as a target for the enemy's guns. In this quarter our artillery proved itself superior to that of the enemy, and effectually checked the bombardment of our trenches. There was also heavy shelling on the right. On the right centre the enemy's trench mortars were very active.

On Wednesday, January 6, the Germans shelled the suburbs of Armentières heavily, but on the rest of the line the day passed quietly. We continued to make steady progress on the right, in spite of the difficulties produced by water.

According to the reports of airmen, whole districts in Southern Belgium are now flooded, for the Scheldt, as well as the Lys, has overflowed its banks.

On the night of the 6th-7th the enemy on our left showed unusual activity, parties of men being observed moving about in rear of the hostile trenches. Our men opened fire on them and probably inflicted some loss, for stretcher-bearers were seen, later in the night, searching the ground.

On Thursday, January 7, our artillery drove the enemy from one of his trenches opposite our centre. On the right centre our trench mortars scored a success by destroying a house which was being used by the enemy's snipers, and it is believed that the occupants were killed.

The Germans are reported to be collecting all the brass they can find, no doubt for the purpose of extracting the copper required for making fuses. For this purpose the towns and villages behind the front are systematically ransacked, and everything that contains copper is seized, from church bells to household utensils of all kinds.

A good deal has been said in the Press about the bad feeling always latent between the South Germans and Prussians. It is easy to exaggerate this feeling, but there is no doubt that it exists, as any conversation with prisoners proves.

Our Saxon and Bavarian prisoners not infrequently indulge in abuse of their Prussian comrades, and it is reported that on one occasion a Saxon disclosed the fact that certain trenches which had been occupied by his unit were going to be taken over by a Prussian battalion the next morning, and expressed the hope that we would start shelling them after the relief had taken place.

Information continues to come in as to the prevalence of typhoid in the enemy's ranks, and the military hospitals in Belgium are reported to contain many cases.

The German losses appear to have been very heavy during the fighting of the last few weeks. According to prisoners, the average strength of companies in the corps which attacked the British on December 20 had been

before that date 120, but after it they did not muster more than 70.

Some interesting statistics of the losses in a German company have been obtained from a colour-sergeant's pay list which has fallen into our hands. It covers the period from the outbreak of war to October 10, during which time the company lost 70 per cent. of its strength in non-commissioned officers and 60 per cent. of its strength in men, but a point which is of greater interest is the very high proportion of killed to wounded, being no less than 35 to 91, or about 38 per cent.

Of a draft of 78 non-commissioned officers and men who arrived during the week of September 8, 49 are recorded as killed, wounded, or missing during the ensuing month. From figures which have been obtained relating to other units these losses are certainly not exceptional.

Various means of enabling men who have suffered from exposure and hardship in the trenches to rest and recuperate have already been mentioned, such as the use of baths after their tour of duty is over and convalescent homes for those who temporarily require a rest. All these means are combined and can be seen to the best advantage at a large establishment at General Headquarters, which is being used as a convalescent home capable of accommodating 1,000 men.

The building is a jute factory which has only just been built, and has not yet been used. To this are brought men who may be suffering from minor ailments, such as swollen feet, rheumatism, neuritis, and exhaustion, the results of life in the open in such weather as we have experienced. On being brought in the men are at once given a bath in a shed heated by steam which runs along one side of the building, their clothing is taken away and either destroyed or cleaned, and they are then admitted into the main building, with its rows of beds, where they can rest until well enough to return. The complete change, and, above all, the effects of a good wash, work wonders, and a few days are generally sufficient to render them again quite fit for work. When recovered they are not at once sent back to duty in the trenches, but are

given light work for a few days at the headquarters of their units.

The experiences of this war have caused many profound modifications in the theories commonly held before it broke out, but no factor was, perhaps, so under-estimated as the effect of high-explosive projectiles fired by guns and howitzers. The opening of the war found the Allies in a position of inferiority to the enemy in this respect, an inferiority which has, however, since been made good, and the Germans are now experiencing to a far greater extent than before the devastating effect of these missiles. The successes of the Japanese at Port Arthur had given an inkling of the potentialities of the heavy howitzer against permanent fortifications, but the decisive effect of high explosive against troops in the field in well-concealed entrenchments has come as a complete surprise.

The gunner, and more especially the garrison gunner, has come into his own, for this arm of the service has assumed an importance greater probably than it has ever before possessed, and certainly greater than it has known since the time of Napoleon, who, an artillery officer himself, placed great reliance on the moral and material effect of the fire of massed batteries concentrated against that section of the enemy's line which it was his intention to break. But for the last 100 years, against troops in the field, artillery has, generally speaking, been depended on to create a moral effect rather than to achieve any great material result, and it has been reserved for this war to prove that it is the chief agent in destroying the enemy's power of resistance. It is extremely hard to conceal the position of trenches from an aerial observer, and once their position is notified to the guns and the exact range is obtained, it is not long before whole lengths of trenches will be blown in and entanglements, trous-de-loup, and every form of obstacle, however ingenious, swept away.

That the moral effect is very great is shown by the written and verbal evidence of prisoners who have lately been captured. The Allied artillery is gradually assuming a superiority over the German, a factor of great importance in the prosecution of our general offensive.

X

ARTILLERY WARFARE

(January, 1915.)

January 12, 1915. .

The general situation remains the same as it has been for weeks. During Friday and Saturday, January 8 and 9, nothing occurred beyond a more or less continuous artillery and mortar duel in which our superiority was maintained. On Friday our trench mortars destroyed another house near Neuve Chapelle, which was being used by snipers, and stopped the enemy's attempts to sap; and near Messines our guns shelled a detachment of about 300 infantry with considerable effect. Similar satisfactory reports as to the action of our artillery have come in from different parts of the line.

On Saturday the fire of a certain number of our guns, was concentrated upon the area immediately west of La Bassée. This bombardment was particularly effective, and, according to the statement of a prisoner since captured, caused, between 150 and 300 casualties to the enemy.

Sunday, the 10th, was the finest day we have had for some time. In the early afternoon our troops retook the observation post on the railway embankment south-east of Givenchy, which we had evacuated on January 1. A machine-gun emplacement was also seized by us, but owing to its exposed position was not retained. The observation post, however, remained in our hands, in spite of three counter-attacks which the enemy delivered during the night. This fighting took place west of the area known as the "railway triangle of Cuinchy," where

the ground is broken by shale heaps and shallow pits, which afford good cover.

Along the rest of the line the German artillery was more active than it has been for some days. Otherwise nothing of interest occurred, except a minor success gained in the centre by our anti-aircraft guns, which scored a hit upon a German aeroplane, and forced it to return in haste towards its own lines.

On Monday, the 11th, our guns shelled Neuve Chapelle with good results, also the triangle near Cuinchy. In the centre some direct hits were obtained on a house occupied by snipers.

During the last few days there has been a considerable amount of wind, especially at high altitudes. This has been felt by the airmen, but has not prevented reconnaissance. On one day it was blowing so hard that an observer engaged in photographing a certain area found himself actually travelling backwards relatively to the ground at the rate of 10 miles an hour, though he was on a very fast machine going ahead at full speed through the air.

As a consequence of the recent heavy and almost continuous rain, the struggle against the forces of Nature has assumed almost greater importance than that being waged against the enemy. The River Lys has now risen two metres, flooding large areas, and the dykes, canals, and ditches which intersect the fields have also in many places overflowed their banks. The roads carried on embankments are as a rule still slightly above water-level. The river-line held by the Germans below Armentières is inundated for a considerable width; and north of the river in the Menin-Courtrai district the floods are in places two miles in width.

In spite of very trying conditions, our men keep wonderfully cheerful and well, such cases of sickness as there are being to a great extent of a minor nature only requiring a few days' rest.

The ingenuity of the British soldier in inventing picturesque names for the various engines of destruction brought to bear against him is well known, and, with the develop-

ment of new weapons, the number of nicknames in use has been extended until they form a language which is most bewildering to a stranger. Thus the enemy's trench mortar, or *Minenwerfer*, goes by the name of "The German Undertaker"; the anti-aircraft gun has for some unknown reason been christened "Archibald," and a certain type of German howitzer shrapnel is known as "The Woolly Bear," from the thick white smoke emitted when it bursts.

The different types of our own ordnance, also, all have their designations. A certain heavy howitzer, whose dull boom is easily distinguishable above the reports of any other piece, is affectionately termed "Mother," while another is somewhat inappropriately called "Baby."

The French also have names for the German projectiles. The heavy field howitzer shell, known to us as "Jack Johnson," is called "Une Marmite," and the smaller field howitzer shell "Une Petite Marmite."

There is a certain amount of desertion from the enemy's ranks, caused, no doubt, by the general condition of life in such weather as is now being experienced. Desertion among Alsatians is not uncommon, in spite of the precautions which, according to prisoners, have been taken to prevent it. Apparently the Alsatians have been divided into two categories before going up to the front. Those considered reliable have been sent to fight in the West, while the others have been despatched to Poland. The difference in quality between the men who now make up the German reinforcements appears to be very marked. The Landwehr units are spoken of in very high terms, but the Landsturm men, in spite of the fact that only picked men are taken, are said to make very indifferent soldiers, the truth probably being that men on the wrong side of 35 who have spent several years in civil life, even though originally good material, are as a rule unfitted for the hardships of active service.

Nevertheless, in spite of the rather heterogeneous character of units, the only signs of weakening to be observed are rather in the general situation, in the continued pressure exerted by the Allies, and in the failure of nearly all

the German counter-attacks. In one respect the enemy's *personnel* has improved, for it seems that soldiers under 18 years of age were sent to the rear some time ago. These youths were, no doubt, used as a stop-gap until more seasoned troops should become available, for the ranks of the new formations which took the field in October contained many such, and right well did they fight.

January 16, 1915.

On Tuesday, the 12th, the observation post west of Guinchy which had been captured by us on the 10th was evacuated owing to its being rendered untenable by the enemy's artillery and mortars. We were able, however, to deny its possession to the Germans, who near here, in the "railway triangle," are entrenched behind heaps of sleepers, ballast, and other railway material—cover of a nature which is susceptible to much damage from artillery fire. In this area our guns have done much execution. On one occasion a sleeper was hurled by the explosion of one of our shells into our trenches.

There was a decided increase in the hostile artillery fire on this day at different points of our line.

On Wednesday the weather, which had shown some improvement, again took a change for the worse, and it rained heavily all day. Successful sniping at different points of our line and considerable shelling were alone reported.

Our guns have been successful in demolishing the important bridge at Frelinghien, below Armentières. Fire was directed upon it some time ago, and though it was reported to have been damaged, doubts existed as to the exact extent of the harm done. It is now stated by our aviators to be completely ruined.

On Thursday, the 14th, the enemy showed more activity on the right in the neighbourhood of the "railway triangle," and the shelling along the whole of our right and right centre was more severe. Our guns succeeded in doing further damage to Frelinghien by destroying the brewery and neighbouring houses.

The news published in some of the English papers of to-day's date that we captured a German position near La Bassée on the 14th is incorrect. No attack was attempted, all action being confined to that specified above.

On Friday, the 15th, the increase in the hostile artillery fire all along our front was maintained.

During these four days there has been less rain and the floods have subsided slightly.

The enemy's physical and mental condition is a point of interest and importance, but in attempting to study it it is necessary to guard against the temptation to jump to conclusions or to form hasty opinions based on the statements of men who probably sometimes represent the inferior elements in the hostile forces, such as prisoners. Making due allowance for this, however, there does seem to be a difference in the state of feeling of the German rank and file from that which existed some weeks ago. Some of our prisoners now realize that a victorious advance is out of the question, and that their duty is merely to hold their ground. Though the idea that Germany is going to gain any advantage commensurate with the sacrifices she has incurred appears to a great extent to have disappeared, there are at the same time few who contemplate the possibility of defeat and invasion.

As regards physical well-being, it is doubtful if the German troops are so favourably situated as our own. They are not so warmly clad, and though there appears to be a sufficiency of food, hot meals are not always forthcoming. Their medical arrangements, also, are inferior to ours, and to judge from the medical panniers which have been captured their appliances are antiquated. Many civilian physicians without surgical knowledge are being employed, the work having become altogether beyond the powers of the establishment of army surgeons. Two such doctors were recently allowed to operate on their own wounded in one of our hospitals. Since they were without the necessary instruments, these were lent to them; but they showed a surprising ignorance of their use and ruined several intended for disarticulating sinews

and ligaments by attempting to cut through bones with them. After this they were not permitted to operate.

These points of inferiority are more than set off by the general efficiency of the fighting machine, the excellence of the staff work, the high discipline, and the thoroughness with which nearly every military requirement has been thought out and provided for. Orders have been captured giving minute instructions as to the care of clothing and equipment, sanitary arrangements, and other details, which show great forethought and a high standard as regards interior economy. This minute care for the well-being of the living soldier, so long as he can fight, however, is combined with a callousness to losses, when the sacrifice of life is thought necessary, which points to formidable powers of resistance.

It is a truism to say that the introduction of aviation has had a profound effect upon the whole character of military operations. And in no way has it modified war more than by greatly eliminating the element of surprise, for so long as the weather permits of the employment of aerial reconnaissance, it is impossible for any great concentration or movement of troops to be carried out by day within a certain radius without being discovered. Especially in the form of warfare in which both sides are at present engaged is the former function of cavalry as regards reconnaissance usurped by the Flying Corps.

There are, generally speaking, two forms of reconnaissance, whether executed by aviators or cavalry, tactical and strategical. It is difficult to draw a hard and fast line between them, or to define exactly where one begins and the other ends; but the former may be said to be undertaken exclusively for the purpose of ascertaining the strength and dispositions of the enemy in a strictly limited area along a battle front, by locating and examining his trenches, gun emplacements, headquarters, reserves, supply parks, and railheads. Its sphere ceases at a comparatively short distance from the front of the opposing forces. All that is going on in the area far behind the enemy's lines comes within the sphere of strategical reconnaissance, which is undertaken with the object of obtaining

information about the enemy in a particular part of the theatre of war and so enabling a commander to form an idea as to his opponent's designs.

While tactical reconnaissance is chiefly of value to corps or divisional commanders, to enable them to know what is in their immediate front and to make their local dispositions accordingly, the higher leading and direction of the large masses—in a word, the plan of campaign framed by a Commander-in-Chief and his General Staff—depend upon the results of strategic reconnaissance.

The intelligence upon which such plans will be based is that referring to the amount of transport and rolling-stock on roads and railways, the strength of columns of troops, the size and situation of bivouacs, parks, and supply depots, second lines of defence, and any other facts which may afford a clue to the strength and disposition or movements of an enemy's masses and to his intentions.

To gather information of this nature by aerial reconnaissance the observer either travels above a previously selected line of country or passes to and fro over a certain definite area, noting and recording everything of value that he sees. This latter method is the slower and is used only when very detailed information is required.

This is not work which can be carried out by everyone. The really first-rate observer must possess extensive military knowledge in order to know what objects to look for and where to look for them; he must have very good eyesight in order to pick them up; and he must have the knack of reading a map quickly, both in order to mark correctly their positions and to find his way. To reconnoitre is not easy even in fine weather; but in driving rain or snow, in a temperature perhaps several degrees below zero, or in a gale, when an aeroplane travelling with the wind rocks and sways like a ship in a heavy sea and may attain a speed of 150 miles an hour, the difficulties are immense. In these circumstances, and from the altitude at which it is necessary to fly in order to escape the projectiles of anti-aircraft guns, columns of

transport or of men are easily missed. Indeed, at a first attempt an observer will see nothing which is of military value, for it is only after considerable practice that the eye becomes accustomed to scouring a great stretch of country from above and acquires the power of distinguishing objects upon it.

Psychology also comes in, and the temperament of an observer is of the greatest importance. He must be cool and capable of great concentration in order to keep his attention fixed upon his objective in spite of all distractions such as, for instance, the bursts of shell close to him, or the noise of rifle bullets passing through the planes of his machine. He must withstand the temptation to make conjectures or to think that he has seen something when he is not absolutely certain of the fact, since an error in observing or an inaccuracy in reporting may lead to false conclusions and cause infinite harm.

Many men are absolutely unfitted for such duty, and even trained observers vary in their powers of reconnaissance. Some have a special aptitude for strategical work, the wide field of action and the chance of gaining an insight, as it were, into the workings of the enemy's mind appealing to their imagination and to their taste for discovery. The spirit of adventure also enters, for long reconnaissances are hazardous; and before the minds of those carrying them out the prospect of being forced by engine trouble to descend in the enemy's lines cannot but frequently be present.

January 19, 1915.

Some good combined artillery work which was not mentioned in the last summary was carried out on our right during the 15th. A heavy battery and a battery of field artillery, working in co-operation, first shelled some dug-outs of the enemy which had been located. The occupants bolted from the dug-outs to the shelter of a house, but our heavy guns quickly ranged on this new refuge, and when the Germans retreated to some woods the field guns opened on them with shrapnel. Our howitzers shelled a convoy and destroyed some wagons; and a

heavy battery obtained three direct hits on an observing station at Violaines.

On Saturday, the 16th, all action was again confined to that of artillery; but the enemy's bombardment was less vigorous than it had been on the previous day, and our guns maintained a marked superiority. On the left they made good practice against some trenches and houses; and on the left centre they found a good target in the shape of a battalion marching into a small wood. In the neighbourhood of Neuve Chapelle they obtained two direct hits on transport wagons.

The continuous artillery combat almost takes the form of a game in some parts of the field. So soon as the German batteries start shelling us our guns are directed against certain places in the enemy's lines, the bombardment of which we know by experience will soon induce him to desist. Having obtained the range of most of the hostile batteries, we can generally reduce them to silence, or, at any rate, render their fire comparatively harmless.

On Saturday the weather continued dry and windy, and consequently the conditions in the trenches somewhat improved. In spite of a wind which at an elevation of 3,000 feet was blowing at nearly 90 miles an hour, successful flights were accomplished by our aeroplanes. During Friday and Saturday the water-level of the River Lys fell a foot.

On Sunday the enemy's artillery fire was again more violent, especially opposite our left and centre. Our guns replied with good effect. On the right they cleared the German snipers off the railway embankment west of La Bassée. To the north and north-west of Givenchy they shelled a series of breastworks and redoubts, with the result that the parapets were blown in in several places and the garrisons forced to retire under rifle fire from our infantry.

On Monday, the 18th, the Commander-in-Chief held an inspection of a large force of cavalry, including many Indian regiments. It was drawn up in line of brigades, each regiment in column of squadrons, with artillery and transport. The scene had for its setting open rolling

ground, thinly sprinkled with snow and backed by dark woods. The forest of lances seen against the wintry sky, the long line of horsemen, many of them turbaned, and the sullen-looking guns formed a most impressive picture. The Commander-in-Chief addressed a few words to each regiment as he passed. Both men and horses were in splendid condition and looked fit for anything.

The British left was heavily shelled during the day, but with very little result. On the right our guns obtained a direct hit on one of the enemy's observation posts and silenced a gun in the neighbourhood of the "railway triangle." The enemy has made attempts to repair the dug-outs which were destroyed by us on the 15th, but owing to our artillery fire these efforts have been unsuccessful. Our trench mortars have also been most successful in this quarter, and have obtained several direct hits on the German trenches.

An example of the kind of story being circulated in Germany as to our treatment of our prisoners is an article in the evening edition of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* dated December 18, 1914. In this—which purports to be an "official" report—is given a deposition made by one Volunteer Erich Callies. It is to the effect that he was captured by an English outpost and kept tied to a tree for some hours; that he was several times forced to ascend in an aeroplane in his shirt-sleeves, in order to point out the positions of the German troops, name the units holding them, and drop bombs upon them. According to his statement he had to submit to many interrogations and was repeatedly struck on the face if he did not answer. He finally made his escape, but became very ill from the effects of this inhuman treatment. This deposition is supposed to have been made under oath in hospital at Leipzig-Plagwitz on November 28, 1914, and it is signed by Callies and two officials in whose presence it was made.

It is hardly necessary to state that the whole story is a pure fabrication. Reference is only made to it because it is a somewhat glaring instance of the nonsense that is being published. Presumably it would not have

appeared in print unless it were likely to be accepted in Germany as being true, and possibly believed in some neutral countries where public opinion might be biased, against the British. Apart from any other consideration, the absurdity of taking up in an aeroplane a private soldier who had presumably never before made an ascent, in order to ascertain the position of units of which he could have known nothing, is of itself a sufficient refutation of the story. And even if we had been guilty of this folly we should hardly have rendered the task of the man more difficult by inflicting needless hardship upon him. The publication of this farrago in a presumably reputable newspaper betrays an astonishing credulity on the part of those responsible, or else intense malice and a desire to trade on the credulity of others.

In a sceptical and materialistic age like the present it is somewhat surprising to find reliance being placed on charms. And yet not a few of our prisoners are in possession of so-called "prayers," which are really written charms against death, wounds, disease, and every imaginable evil. One such document recently found on a prisoner begins thus: "A powerful prayer, whereby one is protected and guarded against shot and sword, against visible and invisible foes, as well as against all manner of evil. May God preserve me against all manner of arms and weapons, shot and cannon, long or short swords, knives or daggers, or carbines, halberds, and anything that cuts or points, against thrusts, rapiers, long and short rifles, or guns, and such-like, which have been forged since the birth of Christ; against all kinds of metal, be it iron or steel, brass or lead, ore or wood."

After further circumlocution the list goes on to include "all kinds of evil reports, from a blow from behind, from witchcraft, and well-stealing (poisoning?)." But, curiously enough, it omits the only mischance which actually befell the owner—that of being made a prisoner of war. The document is of inordinate length, and ends with some cabalistic letters and numerals and with an obscure reference to a "blessing upon the Archangel Gabriel." Many of these amulets or charms are probably of very

ancient origin, and have been handed down among the German peasantry from generation to generation.

It is difficult for those who do not know something of the problem of maintaining an army in the field to realize what immense efforts and how great an amount of material are required to keep the roads in repair, especially under motor traffic. As has been already mentioned, one great difficulty of doing this in the part of France and Belgium in which we are operating lies in the fact that the paved portion of the roads is in most cases so narrow that vehicles cannot pass each other without going off it, and that the soft earth on each side of the stone paving is in wet weather soon churned up by the heavy lorries in use into a mass of mud upwards of 2 ft. in depth. It has been found necessary, therefore, to improvise some method of increasing the width of the hard surface of the roadway so as to allow of traffic on each side of the *pavé*. This is now being successfully done.

Although *pavé* is one of the most ancient and durable forms of road, even it is broken up in time by the continual passage of heavy motor-lorries. The stones get displaced, and water percolates into the foundation, which is often merely sand or chalk, and washes it away. Then, if there should be a frost after the surface is thus cracked, the moisture which has penetrated freezes and breaks it up still further. The consequence is that the *pavé* itself needs continual attention.

January 23, 1915.

On Tuesday, the 19th, the chief event was a successful aerial raid carried out by us against Ghisteltes, some 12 miles to the west of Bruges. In spite of very misty weather and a certain amount of wind our aeroplanes reached their destination about dawn and, flying very low, dropped several bombs on certain sheds which formed their objective. Exactly what damage was done it is not possible to state, but it is known to have been considerable. On our right we made some excellent practice with bombs from trench mortars against the Germans attempting to repair their parapets. During the night

the enemy opposite the same part of our line were busily occupied in baling water from their trenches.

On Wednesday, on our right, our guns in one place, damaged a German redoubt and in another drove the occupants from a trench. Our mortars, also, were active, and made good practice against the enemy's saps and trenches and some houses. The River Lys rose $5\frac{1}{2}$ in. during the day.

On Thursday, the 21st, all action was confined to that of the artillery proper and the short-range ordnance. By the former a German battery was silenced, a single gun was knocked out, and a pumping station was forced to cease work. The trench mortars again did considerable execution against some of the enemy's saps, their effectiveness being much heightened by subsequent shrapnel fire from the field guns. The Germans were evidently still much troubled by water in their trenches.

Friday, the 22nd, was sunny, with some frost and not much wind, in fact as perfect a day for aviation as can be expected at this time of year; and the Germans took advantage of the weather to make an aerial raid on a large scale against Dunkirk. The details are as follows:—One of our aeroplanes—a single-seater—was on patrol duty when the observer saw several hostile machines approaching. He at once gave chase to the first hostile machine and opened fire on it. Meanwhile two other British machines started from the ground. It took them some little time to ascend the height of 6,000 feet at which the action in the air was proceeding, during which the British machine which had been on patrol had succeeded in driving off with its fire the two leading German machines. Ten others, however, had come up by the time that the three British machines were all in action. After the Germans had dropped several bombs over the harbour and town the whole turned and flew back towards their lines.

Our aeroplanes pursued and brought down one German machine by a bullet through one of its cylinders. The aeroplane was captured, together with its pilot and observer and eight unexploded bombs. The observer

was armed with a double-barrelled pistol for firing chain shot. In face of the heavy odds against them this feat on the part of our aviators was distinctly meritorious. The damage done by the raiders was slight.

In the right centre and on our right our trench mortars had some success.

On some parts of our front it has been noticed that the Germans are firing a new type of high-explosive shell, its visible characteristics being that it detonates with a cloud of thick white smoke. Their *Minenwerfer*, also, occasionally throws a very large bomb or aerial torpedo. It is 3 ft. 9 in. in length, nearly 10 in. in diameter, and with its bursting charge of about 100 lb. of high-explosive weighs just over 200 lb.

The anticipations of the enemy as to the possible duration of the war, also, are shown by the measures they are taking to prepare for the occurrence of any shortage in certain classes of food. In some towns orders have been issued that all the kitchen refuse which is not required by the inhabitants to feed their own animals shall be saved and handed over to the authorities, while efforts have been made to gauge public taste in the matter of preserved meat by selling salted beef, mutton, and pork at cost price.

Though much has been said and written about the artillery that is being used against us, some description of it may not be out of place. It consists, like our own, of guns and howitzers. This statement may possibly need a little elucidation for some readers. The difference between the two classes of ordnance, both of which are breech-loading and rifled, is that the gun is fired with a heavy charge and throws a shell with a high velocity giving a long range and a flat trajectory, while a howitzer, using a smaller charge, throws its projectile with less velocity and a curved trajectory, and has, of course, a shorter range.

The latter weapon therefore is better suited than a gun for indirect fire from behind shelter—such as a hill. It gives better results against troops behind cover, its shells having a greater searching effect, owing to the steep angle

at which they fall, and being less likely to ricochet. It also possesses another advantage; on account of the smaller charge, the strain produced in a howitzer by firing a shell, would be less than that produced in a gun throwing a projectile of the same weight, and the howitzer could therefore be the lighter and more mobile piece. It follows that a howitzer can fire a heavier projectile than can a gun of the same weight. This point has been exploited to the full by the Germans; and, as may have been gathered, one feature of the present war has been the employment by them of a great number of howitzers of large calibre.

To take first the class of ordnance which is most numerous in every field army--the field artillery. The German field gun is a quick-firing piece of 77 millimetres, or 3'03 in. calibre, which is much the same as that of our own, 3'3 in. It fires both common shell and shrapnel. The former is filled with high-explosive which is detonated by either time or percussion fuse. The shrapnel is burst in the same way.

Heavier guns, such as those of 10 and 13 centimetres calibre, though classified as siege artillery, are used by the Germans in the field. The latter is drawn by motor and is transported on and fired from a special carriage. The wheels of this are provided with a "wheel-belt" which consists of a series of feet arranged so as to distribute the pressure produced by the shock of discharge.

Of the howitzers, to the employment of which in field warfare the Germans have devoted so much attention, there are several sizes, the smallest being hitherto alone called a field piece. The light field howitzer, of 10'5 cm. or 4'13 in. calibre, fires a projectile known as the *Einheitsgeschoss*, or universal shell. This is a shell carrying shrapnel bullets and a high-explosive bursting charge and capable of acting in a dual capacity, either as shrapnel or common shell. Its range is not quite so great as that of the field gun. The heavy field howitzer, of 15 cm. or 5'9 in. calibre, fires common shell loaded with high-explosive.

There are, also, two pieces which are called "mortars,"

though they are really howitzers. The "21 cm. mortar," of 21 cm., or 8.27 in., calibre, fires common shell containing a high-explosive charge. The carriage of this piece also has belted wheels. The Krupp 28 cm. mortar, a howitzer of 28 cm., or 11.2 in., calibre, is employed not only to bombard fortresses, but in field actions. It fires common shell loaded with high-explosive. Austrian howitzers of approximately 12 in. calibre are also being used by the Germans. They fire a similar projectile to that of the mortars.

In addition to the above there is the now celebrated Krupp siege howitzer of 42 cm., or 16.8 in., calibre. This fires a common shell loaded with high-explosive and has a considerably greater range than the 28 cm. mortar.

Since allusion has been made to a "mortar" it may be as well to explain the distinction between it and a howitzer. A mortar is a high-angle fire, smooth bore, muzzle-loading piece which is fired at a fixed elevation, variations in range being obtained by alterations to the charge. A howitzer is also a high-angled fire piece, but it is rifled and breech-loading, variations in range being obtained by alterations in the charge combined with adjustment in elevation. The two terms, however, are now used rather indiscriminately.

The nicknames bestowed on the various projectiles by our soldiers have not been allotted scientifically nor on any definite system, and it is not exactly clear to which they apply. For instance, the shells of the 8.27 in. and 11.2 in. howitzers are indiscriminately termed "Jack Johnsons," "Black Marias," and "Portmanteaux." But it is without doubt the *Einheitsgeschoss* of the 4.13 in. light howitzer burst by time fuse that goes by the name of the "Woolly Bear."

The essential difference between shrapnel and common shell is that the former contains a number of round bullets or balls, and the latter does not. Both types have bursting charges, shrapnel either of powder or high-explosive, and common shell of high-explosive. In the employment of shrapnel, which is most effective against troops in the open, the object is to burst the shell by

time fuse above and in front of the target. The balls are then shot forward in a shower over the troops attacked.

Common shell is employed for the destruction of buildings or cover and is usually detonated by percussion fuse on impact with the target. Its man-killing effect is produced by the number of splinters of the thick metal walls which are flung in all directions, by the shock of detonation, and by the falling of *débris* caused. In earth it blasts craters which vary in size according to the size of the shell and the depth to which it penetrates before it explodes. Common shell can also be detonated in the air by time fuse above troops. It then acts much in the same way as shrapnel, but the splinters fly in all directions and not only forwards as the balls of a shrapnel.

XI

GIVENCHY AND LA BASSÉE

(January 25—February 7, 1915.)

January 27, 1915.

On Saturday, the 23rd, on the left, good results were obtained by our artillery, whole stretches of parapet in the German trenches being swept away. On the right, in the neighbourhood of the La Bassée Canal, our trench mortars landed several bombs in a German sap. Our guns also forced an observation balloon to descend and drove off two German aeroplanes. A new type of machine approached our lines. Its novel shape evidently misled the German gunners, for on its return they opened fire on it until it signalled its identity by starlights.

Sunday was fine, and there was a continued fall in the level of the River Lys, which a few days ago had risen to the maximum height it has attained this winter. There was considerable artillery activity south of the La Bassée Canal. On the right centre one of our shells blew up a German magazine.

On Monday, the 25th, the comparative quiet of the past few days was broken by a sudden assumption of the offensive on the part of the enemy. Early in the morning the German artillery opened a heavy fire upon the right of our line and the area behind it. This bombardment was evidently the prelude to an attack in force, and our guns replied by shelling La Bassée and the railway triangle. At 8 a.m. the Germans launched an assault against the British and French on the south of the canal, and at one point penetrated our line. About the same time they also attacked heavily our troops in Givenchy, north of the

canal, and, passing over our front trenches, temporarily gained a foothold in the place. But as their infantry surged forward through the village, our men met them with cold steel, killing 100 with the bayonet. Fighting then proceeded for some hours at close quarters, but by noon we had reoccupied the whole of our original trenches round the village. The Germans showed the utmost determination in this quarter, delivering no less than five attacks on the north-east corner of Givenchy. In these their losses were very heavy, several scattered bodies which had succeeded in penetrating our line being killed practically to a man. Our casualties in this part of the fight were comparatively light.

Meanwhile, on the south of the canal, the struggle was fiercely contested throughout the day. The Germans, advancing along the main road, were caught by the fire of our machine guns, and left the ground littered with dead bodies to the estimated number of 300, and as they came along the railway embankment they were also subjected to machine-gun fire, and suffered greatly; but, as has been said, they managed to penetrate our line at one point. By a counter-attack, however, undertaken about 1 p.m., in co-operation with the French, the Allies drove them back, and though we did not win back our original position, we established ourselves in a fresh line close behind it.

A great part of the area where this fighting took place consists of brickfields, where both sides fought hand to hand. During the day we captured 53 prisoners, including two officers. The total casualties of the Germans are reported to have amounted to considerably over 1,000 in their effort against our line. Against the French also, to the south of us, their attacks were repulsed with slaughter.

They showed considerable activity at many other points on our front. They subjected our right centre to a heavy bombardment by trench mortars and artillery, and also made an attack in some strength on the French east of Ypres, in the neighbourhood of Zonnebeke. Here they were repulsed with ease in an abortive attempt at a

surprise, leaving 300 dead bodies hanging on their wire entanglements.

In Givenchy village the fighting was of a most desperate nature, being in many cases at close quarters. Our men in many cases fought with bayonets in their hands and even knocked out many Germans with their fists. A story is told of one man who broke into a house held by eight Germans, bayoneted four and captured the rest, while he continued to suck at a clay pipe.

On the whole it may be said that January 25 was a bad day for the enemy in this portion of their line. They paid very dearly for the one small gain in ground they achieved. Tuesday, the 26th, was quiet, except for artillery fire at different points along our line.

The evidence as to the methods and behaviour of the enemy which is obtained from inhabitants must necessarily be accepted with caution, but there are certain reports which appear to be corroborated from various sources of information. One of these is that in many of the districts occupied by the Germans pillaging is carried out on an organized system, the houses being ransacked and their contents loaded on to trains and sent to Germany. Another is that men of military age have been seized and sent to Germany, and that civilians in many cases have been forcibly employed in military labour.

The care that has been taken of British soldiers' graves by the inhabitants in this part of the country has already been noted; but it is not only in Flanders that we are indebted to them for this service. Officers who have travelled along the French lines and across the districts traversed by our Army in the retirement and advance to the Aisne bear witness to the touching endeavours of the French peasants to tend and beautify the last resting-places of their Allies, it being apparently a point of honour with them to bestow as much care on them as on those of their own dead.

When it is remembered what ruin and misery have been caused to the countryfolk in the track of the invaders, the fact that they should have the time and energy to rise above their own suffering in order to bestow this

attention upon our dead is all the more remarkable. Over these graves, which were hastily dug and on which no record was placed originally, wooden crosses have been erected bearing the simple inscription "Soldat Anglais." Often a khaki cap is hung on the cross and the grass mound is beautified with cut flowers or artificial wreaths.

It will be learnt with sorrow that the regimental pet goat of a certain famous regiment has died on active service.

January 30, 1915.

The lull in the action which took place on the 26th after the German attacks on the 25th has already been noted. On that day one of our aviators made a very successful reconnaissance over a section of the German line. Traveling at a low altitude, he not only obtained much useful information, but managed to drop 10 bombs on the enemy's trenches.

On January 27, the Emperor's birthday was celebrated by a salute from some of our guns of several rounds of lyddite fired against a house in the neighbourhood of Messines much used by the enemy. At first the occupants of the place were seen to be running in all directions. Then the whole building blew up, and there followed a *feu de joie* of smaller explosions, the house apparently having been used as a magazine for bombs and grenades. It was felt by the troops that this display of fireworks was a fitting celebration of the day. On the right our troops gained a little ground. In the same quarter our snipers were very successful and our guns caused the evacuation of a saphead by the enemy. Otherwise there was no action of note.

On the night of the 27th-28th some further ground was regained by us near the Béthune-La Bassée road. The 28th passed quietly, and the hostile shelling was less severe.

On the morning of Friday, the 29th, the enemy again made two determined attacks about 9 a.m. and 9.40 a.m. on the centre and right of the line held by us between the

La Bassée canal and the Béthune road. In the centre our men firmly established in the brickfields gave the Germans a very warm reception, and the latter fell back, leaving 50 dead in front of this point alone. To the south of it they temporarily gained possession of a small portion of one of our trenches, but they were immediately counter-attacked with the bayonet and every man in the trench was killed. The same thing happened close to the Béthune road, where the Germans gained another of our trenches, only to be bayoneted to a man.

After the fighting was over the enemy's dead, to the estimated number of 200, lay thick all along our line. Our casualties were slight. This attack, like these delivered at Givenchy and at Zonnebeke on the 25th, was a costly failure, resulting only in great waste of life. It was made by some 300 men in the first line, 300 more in support occupying the trenches vacated by the first line when it moved forward. Prisoners state that there were 100 dead lying in this trench before the Germans advanced, and that none of the troops making the assault had attacked before.

The French to the south of us were also attacked, but repulsed the enemy.

On this day a German aeroplane flew over Bailleul and dropped four bombs, killing a child and wounding another child and a woman. During the whole of the week up till and including Friday the weather has been bright and frosty, which has been a welcome change.

There has been some suggestion that the sudden recrudescence of activity on the part of the enemy which took place on the 25th inst. was due to a desire to gain a striking success to celebrate the Emperor's birthday. This hardly could have been the case, however, for the two attacks made, one against the French near Zonnebeke and the other against us at Cuinchy-Givenchy, were isolated actions separated by a distance of nearly 28 miles, and having no tactical connection with each other such as might be expected in any co-ordinated effort. This is no place to hazard any conjecture as to what these two separate operations portended, but it does not seem that

they could have formed part of any scheme to mark the birthday of the Emperor.

The intense hatred entertained for us betrays itself in many of the letters sent to soldiers in the field. Here are a few extracts from letters found on dead men:—

MULHEIM, *November 4, 1914*

Here in Mulheim everybody has been called out right up to the Landsturm and the boys of 18. It is most interesting to visit Friedrichsfeld and see the prisoners. There are said to be 20,000 there—Zouaves, Turcos, French, and then the long-legged Englishmen—this damned pack is to blame for everything. When they are transported they are put in closed cattle wagons. The way they are treated is much too good. They should be put against a wall. You write that you are only fighting against the English and have made 600 prisoners. Make them all into minced meat. They have earned nothing better.

MÜLHEIM, *November 23, 1914.*

Everything is fearfully dear here. We should be glad to finish if only an honourable peace comes with it. A fearful lot of us must be falling, as every one is being called out. Everything is all right, only God protect you from Russia; the poor soldiers don't know what to do for the cold, and the Landsturm must go to Russia.

The damned English! What are they doing with our prisoners? And we treat the swine dogs so well! But soon it will be different. A train was to have come here with 340 English. The train arrived. The commander brought out 40 English. When he was asked where the 300 were he didn't know where they had remained. I know better. That is what all should do.

A card written home by a wounded German prisoner, dated 25/1/15 is an interesting commentary on the above letter, and incidentally is a reply to the query, "What are the English doing with our prisoners?":—

I was wounded this morning in an attack, and was captured by the English. Those of the company who are not dead are

prisoners. Am treated very well, so don't worry at all. Our lieutenants were also taken prisoners. I feel well. Tell my relatives.

The existing ignorance and credulity about affairs in the British Empire is shown by the statement that it was generally believed that at our request 150,000 Japanese troops had been sent to maintain order in India, and that grave doubts were held as to whether we could ever get rid of them again. As a proof of the intention to hold on to Belgium the fact that a German brewery had been started in Antwerp was quoted.

The German soldiers appear to be well looked after, special care being taken of their feet. The low-lying trenches are provided with board floors above water level, and on leaving them the men are made to remove their boots and socks, when their feet are rubbed and dusted over with some kind of powder. All soldiers are compelled to be inoculated against typhoid and cholera. Many of those now serving were living in England before the war, and some of the captured have expressed an ardent desire to return there. The other day a deserter astonished our men by suddenly rushing towards them unarmed, shouting "Nach London!" as he jumped into our trenches.

Another extract from a diary shows the German soldiers in a more human light:—

December 26.—Arrival of gifts from home. Eating all day.

December 27.—Same as usual. Orchestral performance at 1 o'clock with two bells and a mouth organ, three bottles, a plate with coins, and a drawer. Artillery duel that makes the ground tremble.

February 2, 1915.

Saturday, January 30, was bright and warm. The day passed in comparative quiet, although the enemy shelled our left and left centre severely. Our artillery practice, however, produced good results at many points along the front. Among other successes, our shells set fire to a building which was being much used by the enemy in a village east of Neuve Chapelle, and with the

assistance of our aircraft a direct hit was made on a German gun near Frélinghien. A hostile column of infantry observed by our aeroplanes on a road opposite our right centre was subjected to a heavy fire, which it is believed inflicted considerable loss. On the right similar results were reported, such as the blowing-up of an ammunition wagon and what was apparently a magazine behind the enemy's trenches. After this explosion occurred shouts and groans were heard and columns of smoke were seen rising from the spot. It is believed that a battery near Lorgies suffered similarly, for after we had shelled it for some time there was a heavy explosion shortly followed by two others, and the battery was enveloped in smoke for a quarter of an hour.

Sunday was entirely uneventful along the British front. To the north of us local attacks took place against the French. In one place some fifty Germans tried to rush a French trench, and were annihilated by artillery and rifle fire. In this area, south-east of Ypres, a somewhat strange incident occurred. An officer and two men suddenly left the German trenches and rushed forward, and were at once shot. Their action is explicable only on the assumption that there was reluctance on the part of other men to follow. If this be the true explanation, it must be admitted that such conduct on the part of the German troops is rare.

On Monday, February 1, the Germans again attacked south of the La Bassée Canal, but not in such strength as on previous occasions. The fighting began in the early hours of the morning with an assault on a small trench close to the canal. This was successful, two local counter-attacks carried out by us failing to regain the ground lost. When it was light, however, our artillery opened so accurate a fire on the enemy that their position became untenable. A stronger counter-attack was then delivered, and our men, rushing forward, not only drove the Germans from the trench they had captured, but seized another post on the enemy's side of it on the embankment of the canal. There were a succession of German posts on this embankment and we had now

established ourselves in one of them. Our supports then came up and passing through our firing line holding the first of the enemy's posts pushed on to the second, driving out the garrison at the point of the bayonet. Thence our men were enabled to take in the flank one of the enemy's trenches to the south, and they fought their way along it, throwing hand-grenades until they had dislodged the Germans from a considerable length. We thus established ourselves firmly in an advantageous position on the canal bank and in the adjoining trenches.

During this action we captured 14 prisoners and two machine-guns, also many wounded. Our losses were not severe, but the enemy suffered heavily, especially from our artillery fire. Although, of course, a minor operation, it was a distinct success on a small scale, and all the more satisfactory in that the useful gain of ground achieved by our troops was the result of an attempt on the enemy's part to drive us from our positions. Our men were in excellent spirits after this encounter, and on being relieved somewhat later marched back to their billets singing to the accompaniment of mouth-organs and the roar of guns.

On this morning the enemy made three attacks on the French to the south of the Béthune road. Two were beaten back by the fire of the defence. The third was a singularly gallant but extremely unsuccessful effort. The assailants reached the French trenches and were then literally almost wiped out, 75 bodies being counted in front of the defenders' line. It is reported that not more than two or three of them escaped to tell the tale.

On the rest of our line there is little to report. In the centre our artillery succeeded in completely demolishing a farm in which a German gun had been located. A hostile aeroplane dropped four bombs near the Lys without doing any damage.

The enemy's losses in the La Bassée area appear to have been very heavy; and the reason for their activity along the canal was that they had suffered severely from the enfilade fire brought to bear on them by one of our machine-guns from the post they attacked. In two days,

also, one of their companies had lost 30 men from shell-fire alone.

A remarkable illustration of the force of explosives was afforded on January 25. Previous to assaulting, the Germans fired a mine under our front trench near the railway triangle to the east of Cuinchy. The explosion hurled a piece of a rail weighing 25 lb. a distance of over a mile into a field close to where some of our men were standing. It is reported, also, that on the morning of February 1 the detonation of one of our lyddite shells in the enemy's trenches on the embankment south of the canal threw a German soldier right across the railway and the canal amongst our men on the north side of the latter.

The fondness of our soldiers for kicking about a football whenever they have a spare moment has often been noted. The men of a supply ammunition column halted by the roadside generally amuse themselves in this way, and the troops in reserve close to the fighting line sometimes while away the time in this manner even when under fire. Our Allies occasionally join in the game with great zest, and it is not an uncommon sight to see a crowd of French and British soldiers struggling madly round two sticks representing a goal not so very far from the firing line.

A graphic picture of life in the German trenches is afforded by a letter found on a German soldier:—

Yesterday the French put three shells into the left of my dug-out. Ten men were hit, seven killed, and the other three were badly wounded.

For three weeks we have been in the same trenches, which at places are 20 metres from the enemy. Twenty metres in front of us are the French, whom I often greet with hand-grenades. Usually some of theirs come over here as well. Shrapnel and shell fly over us all day and into the night, but all this is far easier to endure than the bad weather. It rains every day, and we are never dry.

Prisoners who have lately come from Mülheim, near Basel, state that food prices there have risen greatly. The bread eaten is very black, and grave fears are entertained of a shortage of food in two or three months' time.

The appeal for mouth-organs for the troops uttered on

December 28 was not made in vain. Hundreds of these instruments have been received from kindly donors, and the result can be heard on all sides. Not only do cheerful sounds proceed from billets and dug-outs, but many of the detachments and small bodies of men moving from one point to another now march to the sentimental notes of "Tipperary" or the lilt of "Get out and get under" instead of tramping the slush in silence. The craving of our men for music has evidently touched all classes and ages. Even small children have sent their own well-worn and tiny instruments—probably cherished possessions—as a contribution to the soldiers at the front who are, after all, fighting their battle. The following is a sample of a letter from a small boy—an entire stranger—received at one collecting centre:—

DEAR.....

Allison and me are sending you our mouth-organs for the soldiers. They arnt new ones, but I hadn't any sixpences. With love from.....

This letter from "Allison and me" conveys better than any description the extent to which the heart of the nation is with its fighting men at the present moment.

February, 1915.

A good deal has been said at different times about the way in which our troops are supplied. It is possible, however, that by some of those who are not conversant with military phraseology the term "supply" may be taken to be applicable only to the feeding of an Army. This is not the case, for the provision of food is only one part of the problem of maintaining a force in the field. To be efficient as a soldier a man requires more than the adequate nourishment of the body.

The scope of the branches into which the whole subject of supply is divided is somewhat complicated and cannot be accurately explained in a few words, for these branches are not all exactly defined and in some cases overlap. It may be said that the furnishing of food of every kind

for man and beast is the duty of the Army Service Corps, the furnishing of every drug and appliance necessary for the treatment of the sick and wounded is carried out by the Royal Army Medical Corps, assisted by the various voluntary organizations which started their effective work when war began, while the provision of stores for disabled animals falls to the Army Veterinary Department. The Royal Flying Corps purchases its own machines, as does the Mechanical Transport Branch of the Army Service Corps. Broadly speaking, however, with these exceptions, the Ordnance Department supplies the Army with all the clothing, equipment, arms, ammunition, tools, appliances, machinery, and expendible material that can be required, from guns weighing many tons to tints. In a word, it is the Military Universal Provider, and its activities cover a far wider field than might be imagined from its name, which suggests a connection with that which appertains to guns alone. Indeed, with forces of the size now attained by the British Army in the Field and with the technical complications introduced into modern war material by the advance of science, it is difficult to say which is the more striking—the actual mass of the material handled by this department or the bewildering variety of the articles dealt in.

The vastness of the work of maintaining the Army—apart from feeding it—may be gauged from a few figures. In one month there were issued to the troops:—

450 miles of telephone wire.
570 telephones.
534,000 sandbags.
10,000 lb. of dubbing for boots.
38,000 bars of soap,
150,000 pairs of socks, and
100,000 pairs of boots.

In 10 days the number of fur waistcoats given out amounted to 118,160, while during the same period 315,075 flannel belts were distributed. The way that insignificant items mount up where large numbers of men are concerned is shown by the fact that the weight of

the average weekly issue of vaseline for the feet is five tons, and that of horseshoes 100 tons. On the other hand, the complexity of the work can be gathered by reference to the official "Vocabulary of Stores," which corresponds to the price list of a large shop, and contains 50,000 separate items. The different patterns and varieties of the same article stocked is also somewhat surprising. For instance, there are several hundreds of kinds of spanners in use in the Service, spanner No. 203 being listed as required for "gland and valve of cap securing inner chamber of air cylinder and filling valve, spindle intensifier, barbette, B.L. 9·2 in. Mark IV., also filling and emptying valve gland air cylinder, barbette B.L. 9·2 in. Marks V. to V.B." Even such unusual demands have been made as those for bitter aloes—to put on head ropes to prevent horses biting them—and permanganate of potash for dyeing grey horses brown. And not only is the variety of the stores used greater than it was formerly. Each article tends to become more complicated in itself. Guns, and their mountings and carriages, and ammunition with its delicate fuses, the handling of which originally formed the chief duty of the department, are of course far more elaborate than they used to be, as are the electrical instruments used by the Engineers for telegraph, wireless and telephone—the employment of which has to such a large extent superseded the old simple flag and lamp signalling and heliography. Even such things as water carts are now fitted with an elaborate arrangement of filters.

The duties of the department can be divided into those of supply and maintenance. The first consists of estimating betimes what will be required, of framing scales of issue and checking demands for it, or ordering, procuring, and testing or making it, of providing the troops with it, and of accounting for it afterwards. In most cases the articles used by the army are made either in Government or private factories at home; but some are manufactured by the Ordnance Department in its own workshops in France. In the case of anything of a mechanical nature the duties of the "Ordnance" are not

finished when the article is handed over to the troops who use it, for it is still carefully watched, gauged and tested, maintained in order, and if necessary repaired or replaced. The importance of this work in connection with guns, ammunition, or explosives needs no emphasis. To carry on, indeed, the officers and men of the department must not only possess a knowledge of their own work, but have to be well acquainted with the establishments, formations and requirements of every kind of unit. For the testing and repair of machinery there is a specially and technically trained staff of officers, warrant officers, and men, and stationary and travelling workshops, whilst all armourers, whether employed in the ordnance workshops or with regiments, belong to the department.

It must be remembered that since the units of an army on active service are either fighting or waiting ready to fight, and are therefore scattered over a large area, the problem of distribution, whether it be of food, ordnance stores, parcels, or letters, is bound to be one of great difficulty. It is in most cases impossible for the soldiers to go collectively or individually to some central depot or shop where they can draw what they want. The stuff must be taken out and delivered to them. This of course applies equally to the question of food; but there are two points which make the distribution of ordnance stores less easy than that of food, and that is the variety of the former and the fact that some of them have to a certain extent to meet the requirements of the individual. For instance, it is not sufficient that a soldier who wants a coat and boots should receive a coat and boots of good quality. He must have the particular sizes of these articles which fit him; whereas if he needs bread and meat his wants are met if he gets the right quantity and it is good. All this question of sizes and fit of course adds to the complication of obtaining stores and issuing them.

Briefly, the procedure adopted to ensure that the troops receive promptly what they need is as follows:—For all ordinary stores for which there is a steady demand and of which an estimate of requirements can be framed

in advance, the Ordnance officer with a Division sends down to the Base—which is really a depot or reservoir of stores—an order for a week's supply made out in anticipation. If this order were complied with at one stroke and the whole of the week's supply sent up in one consignment by rail from the Base to railhead—the point where transport ceases—the result would be congestion and confusion, for the mass could not be handled and sent out to the troops at once, nor could it be stored where it was off-loaded. Moreover, it might happen that the troops would not at the moment be in a position to take delivery of the stores for which they had asked. From the Base, therefore, a proportion of the weekly demand is sent up to railhead daily, and from this amount the divisional ordnance officer is able to satisfy each day part of the current requirements of the units. Two great principles which are strictly adhered to are, on the one hand, not to off-load from the rail and accumulate a stock at a temporary point, such as railhead, where it cannot be handled, and on the other hand not to lock up railway rolling-stock by keeping trucks under load. To avoid a block, therefore, it pays to send back to the Base the unexpended balance of a day's consignment which is not issued to troops on arrival at railhead. This applies to ordinary stores, but there are exceptions which need not be specified.

For all technical stores for which there is not a steady demand and which are not required in bulk the system is different. The divisional ordnance officer wires to the base to send up from stock at once whatever is required.

Once on rail, ordnance supplies follow the same channel of delivery as the food. Up to railhead they are conveyed on special trucks in the supply trains, and thence by motor transport to the refilling stations, whence they are taken up to the fighting line in the horsed vehicles of units.

So far as the ordnance is concerned, the Base, besides being a depot, includes huge workshops where all kinds of stores are manufactured and repaired. A description of these, however, is reserved for an account of the Base as a whole.

To equip the army, of course, is the main thing. And the amount of experience and forethought necessary to ensure that the immense but fluctuating stream of material required should always reach its destination, and reach it in time, can be imagined. But there is another side of the work which cannot be neglected, though it is less vital than prompt delivery; and that is the accounting for the stores expended. This entails a vast amount of dull and arduous clerical labour at the various depots, advanced bases, and bases, the latter far away from any possible excitement to be obtained from propinquity to the firing line. This work, however, loses none of its value as an aid to the successful prosecution of the campaign because it is not "in the limelight," but is carried on silently, continuously, unseen by most and unknown to many.

Nevertheless, it is not altogether without relief. The "Vocabulary of Stores" is a perennial source of amusement. The system of nomenclature adopted, though the only one which lends itself to ready reference, is at first sight cumbrous, the actual name of an article invariably preceding any adjective or qualifying description. For instance, no ordnance officer would ever think of referring to a tell-tale clock as such. He would call it "Clock tell-tale portable 6 Stations, Mark II. one." There are indeed many stories current regarding the addiction of the department to this inverted phraseology. According to one, an official is supposed to have asked at a restaurant for a "Choke-artirusalem—Je." Another story refers to the habit of economizing words which becomes almost second nature to those continually engaged in telephoning and making long lists. A warrant officer of the department who was of a devout temperament was in the habit of assisting at Church service. On one occasion, when announcing the hymn, he read out in a loud voice of command: "Hymn Number two double o seven, "Art thou weary; ditto languid; ditto sore distressed?"

The demands and messages sometimes received by overworked and harassed officers of this department are puzzling in the extreme; and the following telegram

recently delivered to one such illustrates some of the difficulties of catering for an army composed of different races:—

4982: 24/II/14: O.G. 796, Mohammedan or Punjab lotah has a spout. With or without handle. Hindoo or Bombay lotah generally of brass, but no spout or handle. Is carried by lip. Hindoos and Mahomedans here both agree that a Katorah never has a spout, but is a sort of metal bowl. Confirm that you want the spouted articles, for which nearest substitute is enamelled teapot. xxx.

In reference to complaints as to loss of property on ambulance trains some official suggested the provision of a safe and a lady purser. To this the reply was that the safe would be furnished if it was thought necessary, but that the lady was not an ordnance supply.

In spite of difficulties, and of peculiarities such as are hinted at above, there is no body of officers, non-commissioned officers and men who work harder and do more for the efficiency and comfort of the whole army than those of the Ordnance Department.

February 5, 1915.

Tuesday, February 2, was marked by no incident of any importance. The Germans did not attempt to drive us from the ground won on the previous day near Cuinchy, and we strengthened our position undisturbed. Owing to our ability to enfilade a part of their trenches from our forward position on the canal bank, they abandoned a part of their line, leaving quantities of rifles and equipment behind them, a sign that their troops had been considerably shaken by our offensive and had retired in disorder.

One of our batteries in this quarter succeeded in obtaining two hits on a hostile observation post. On the rest of the front there was nothing beyond the usual sniping and shelling.

On Wednesday there was some increase in the hostile artillery fire against our left and centre. In the neigh-

bourhood of Messines our trench mortars compelled the enemy to abandon a portion of their front line, and to retire across the open under our rifle fire, from which they suffered considerably. •

One of our aviators dropped 10 bombs on the aerodrome at Lille, which are believed to have been effective, while a German airman flew over Bailleul and threw two bombs without inflicting damage.

On Thursday, the 4th, the shelling against the left and centre of our line was severe, and the enemy showed increased activity. Between 7 and 8 p.m. a local attack was attempted by a small body against us to the south of Armentières. After a heavy artillery and rifle fire searchlights were directed on our trenches, and an assault was launched; but it was at once checked and driven back by our rifle fire. The rest of the night passed quietly.

The enemy's aircraft were very active, especially on the left, where they endeavoured to reconnoitre the positions of our trenches and batteries. As usual, however, their aeroplanes declined to engage ours and made for their own lines when approached. The ascendancy obtained by our aviators was once again shown by an incident which occurred on this day. One of our machines endeavoured to engage two hostile aeroplanes, which thereupon turned towards home. They descended to their own lines; but their pursuer, determined not to be balked of his prey, though they had reached their aerodrome, threw two bombs on them, then fired 50 rounds at them, and flew away. A German machine flew over Hazebrouck and dropped bombs which injured two women. A man who was cleaning a window had an extraordinary escape, for although the window was shattered and the interior of the room wrecked he was untouched.

The past few days have been fine and warm, and our aircraft have taken every advantage of the favourable weather. It has also enabled our artillery to obtain especially good results against the hostile batteries.

Some of the infantry units opposing us now contain large numbers of Ersatz Reservists, amongst whom are

men who were originally put back for some physical defect. Recently these men have been joining after only eight weeks' training.

The casualties of one German company in the recent fighting round Cuinchy have been enormous. In six days it lost from shell fire and bombs 130 men out of a total strength of 160, and the remaining 30 appear to have all been killed, wounded, or captured on February 1. Two other companies which took part in the attack on January 29 were reduced to 20 men each. It is stated that the German soldiers are not in every case sufficiently fed, that the men have to eke out the Government ration by the gifts of food sent by friends and relatives, and that the new *Kriegsbrot* is being issued. The prisoners, however, though not so well fed as our own men, seem fit enough, and certainly do not give the impression of being half starved.

It is reported on reliable authority that on February 10 the German Government will commandeered all the copper, tin, nickel, aluminium, antimony, and hard lead, both raw and worked material, also alloys of these metals.

Of recent documents found on prisoners, the following extract from a miller's letter is of interest as throwing some light on economic conditions in Germany:—

"The rules regarding flour to come into force on the 15th January are as follows: White bread to contain 30 per cent. of rye, rye bread to contain 20 per cent. of potato flour, and now war bread is also to be made containing mashed potatoes."

Here is a portion of another letter, dated 19/1/15, which tells of the strain on Germany's manhood:—

"To-day 29 old Landsturm men left, including Police-Constable Steiger, old Police-Constable Pfaff, and little Hutte Pfaff."

The fanatical hatred against the British expressed by the German people is not displayed to the same degree by the soldiers, for both their men and ours have learnt to respect one another. Nevertheless, some of the letters

found breathe the same spirit; witness this extract from one dated January 31, 1915:—

“Last week we again had a heavy scrap with the English. When anything is on I am always in it. They are to blame for everything, the yellow devils. They sit there in their trenches and shoot right up to the last minute.”

This unconscious testimony to the tenacity of our infantry is borne out by the losses suffered by those regiments which attacked our trenches on January 25 and suffered so heavily that, according to prisoners, they had to be withdrawn from the fighting line.

One somewhat pathetic diary records the everyday experiences of a German soldier, from Christmas Eve, when he left his home at Mülheim, until January 30—two days previous to his being killed at Cuinchy. The first entry is as follows:—“24th December. At 2.30 p.m. departure from Mülheim, and at 5.30 p.m. cross Belgian frontier at Herbesthal. My thoughts are with my people and my *fiancée*.” On December 28 he is on guard in the trenches. “If my love could see what I look like—dirty and in a helmet. Always raining.”

After this the diary becomes a chronicle of life in the firing line, the joy of being relieved after three days in the trenches, the intense satisfaction of getting an occasional hot meal, the trying work on outpost by night—“continual shooting at my shield, earth flies in my face: very dangerous situation for one hour.” Gradually the entries become more pessimistic in tone as the strain becomes more severe. “24th January. Rest. Everybody wants it. Then comes an order. The 169th propose to attack the English trenches at Auchy and accordingly we must go into reserve instead of resting.” He is then ordered to the scene of the fighting of the 25th.

I will not trust to writing what I saw, heard, and felt on my arrival. The poor men! How much unhappiness! We have losses in our company. Our company leader, our platoon commander, and the commander of the 2nd platoon were wounded. . . . The night passed in the open, freezing and without food. The whole day we had nothing to eat.

26th January.—Fearful hours past and fearful shell fire just in front of our position. The repair of our trenches cost us heavily. Rest only between violent bursts of shelling. I never believed I would come out of it alive. When will the relief arrive? Still nothing to eat. We are to be relieved early to-morrow.

Apparently, however, the relief did not come till the 28th. "In the morning we are relieved. We go to Auchy. I begin to despair of life. We must still keep this position. I have little hope of seeing my home again. God protect me so that I may withstand all this."

The last entry is January 30. "Feel physically and spiritually better. We are housed in a cellar." Two days later the writer was found dead.

The change in warfare generally brought about by the introduction of petrol-driven mechanical transport has been remarked, but its effect on the results attained by artillery is not so obvious and has attracted little attention. So destructive indeed, have modern high-explosive projectiles shown themselves against even the strongest forts constructed of concrete and iron, such as those surrounding Liège, Namur, Maubeuge and Antwerp, that there has been an inclination to give the credit of the results attained to this agency alone. This is, however, not altogether correct.

Permanent works on the perimeter of a fortress have always laboured under one great disadvantage. They are fixed points of known position which can only fire divergently. The attack, on the other hand, has always enjoyed within limits a choice of artillery positions and the power to bring a converging fire from a number of guns dispersed along a large arc upon the forts of the defence.

Hitherto this disadvantage on the part of the defence has to a great extent been neutralized by the resisting power conferred on permanent works constructed in peace by the protection afforded by masses of earth, concrete and armour. It has also been somewhat discounted by the fact that the construction by the attack of siege batteries was a slow process which could hardly

escape the notice of the defence and could frequently be delayed very seriously by the superior fire brought to bear on the batteries before they were completed. For, in all former wars, heavy guns were comparatively immobile when off the railway, and could only be fired from solidly constructed wooden or concrete platforms.

Now, not only is no material of which forts are constructed, however strong, capable of resisting the shell which can be fired against it, but heavy siege artillery has by the introduction of motor traction been rendered mobile wherever good roads exist. Moreover, by mounting guns on carriages with belted wheels even heavy pieces can be fired from their carriages. It is possible, therefore, for the attack to bring up a large siege train under cover of darkness or by roads secure from observation, and to concentrate an overwhelming bombardment on the defence before the latter has time to locate the attacking guns. Furthermore, these guns can be moved about at will, and their positions can be continually changed, so as to minimize the risk of being located.

All the German heavy howitzers with the exception of those of 42 cm. are mounted in this manner. And this accounts both for the success of the Germans against the Belgian fortresses and for the great effect gained by them in field operations during the early part of the campaign. They had the advantage both in weight of ordnance and in the power of rapid concentration, and could thus speedily bring a superior weight of metal into action against any portion of the Allied line.

What changes the increased power of artillery will force on the art of fortification remains to be seen. But they will have been brought about by the mobility conferred on heavy guns by motor traction as well as by the destructive properties of high-explosives.

February 8, 1915.

The last three days have been marked by a success gained on our right, by which we recovered more of the ground lost by us on January 25.

On Friday, the 5th, the hostile shelling of our left and centre decreased in intensity; our guns on our left

centre, however, were successful in setting light to one of the enemy's observation stations, and in another quarter put two German guns out of action, if they did not destroy them. The day was fine, and the aircraft of both sides were correspondingly active. One of our airmen chased a German aeroplane all the way from a point behind the centre of our line to the neighbourhood of Lille, where, after a fight at close quarters in mid-air in which both machines were hit several times, the German descended hurriedly some two miles short of his aerodrome.

On the night of the 5th-6th we made a successful attack on two German sap-heads in the brickfields south of the La Bassée Canal.

From these vantage points a further advance was carried out on the 6th. At 2 p.m. our artillery and that of the French concentrated their fire upon the German defences among the brickstacks and the area beyond. Our heavy howitzers took part in this bombardment, their fire being directed on the railway triangle. The boom of the latter pieces and the detonations of their shell were audible 20 miles away, above the roar of other artillery, while to those close at hand the shrieking of the great projectiles through the air was most impressive, as were the volumes of smoke and *débris* thrown up. The effect of the lyddite shells was truly terrific, one house being blown bodily into the air; and as they burst among the brickstacks they created great havoc amongst the enemy.

At 2.15 p.m. an assault was launched against a strong position or "keep" amongst the stacks of bricks held by the Germans. Our storming columns rushed the work from three sides at once, and captured it with very little loss, for—as prisoners afterwards stated—the noise of bursting shells was so great and the clouds of dust with which the defenders were surrounded were so thick that they did not observe our men advancing until too late. At the same time the trenches to the north of this point, between it and the canal, were stormed by another party. By seizing these points we were enabled to occupy a continuous line southwards from our forward post on the

canal, which formed an advantageous position in front of the brickfields. We captured 19 unwounded prisoners in addition to many wounded, a trench mortar, and a machine gun. The Germans left 70 dead on the ground, while our casualties were insignificant.

The Germans, however, showed no inclination to accept this reverse, for in the early hours of the 7th a body of them advanced along the canal bank, shouting out, "Don't shoot, we are Engineers." This form of stratagem, unfortunately for the enemy, has now lost its novelty. Our men held their fire until the supposed Sappers were only a few yards away, and then opened with a machine gun, with a result that the "Engineers" fell back, leaving 30 dead bodies in front of our line. In the afternoon another attack was attempted, but it melted away under our artillery fire and did not arrive at close quarters.

During the day our heavy artillery caused two explosions in a German heavy battery in this part of the field.

A great feature of the recent fighting has been the accuracy of our artillery fire, both in the action on February 1 and on the 6th and 7th. On the former date our guns accomplished the feat of blowing the Germans out of the trench they were occupying on the embankment, although it was only 40 yards from that which we were holding.

On February 6, also, most of the enemy's casualties were due to our shell fire. The whole of the area both behind and immediately in front of the trenches we now hold was found to be littered with the corpses of hundreds of Germans killed in the various fights since January 25. So accurate was our fire on the 6th that three direct hits were obtained by our heavy guns on three separate brickstacks. Our artillery has here obtained such an ascendancy that after the assault on that day our troops were actually able to put up barbed wire entanglements in front of their trenches in broad daylight without being fired at by the enemy's infantry. The prisoners captured here were despondent and much shaken.

Nothing of interest occurred on the rest of our line during these two days.

The Germans rely very much on incendiary shell for damaging towns, and in their recent bombardment of Armentières made use of projectiles of this type packed with candles composed of celluloid, phosphorus, and wax, which material is so inflammable that it will ignite if placed in the sun.

It has already been mentioned that some of the prisoners captured by us lately have been of comparatively poor physique. In this connection it is interesting to note that during the last few days a dead German was found having two medical certificates in his pocket stating that he was suffering from consumption. They are both signed by a doctor, and are accompanied by an application from his father that his son should not be sent on active service, as he was suffering from lung trouble.

Accurate records of hand-to-hand fighting are difficult to obtain, but certain details of the action on January 25 have been established and are now given, since they convey an idea of the thrilling nature of much of the fighting and of the conduct of our men.

It will be remembered that about 8 a.m. on that day the Germans broke through our line outside Givenchy and entered the village itself, when they were counter-attacked with the bayonet and driven out with great loss. The fighting, however, continued to rage round this place for several hours, the Germans pressing on in swarms, being mowed down, but yet in places reaching our trenches and in others penetrating beyond them.

But even when our line was broken portions of it continued to resist, and our infantry holding them, when assailed from the rear, remained steady, faced about, lined the parados, or back parapet, and met the enemy with rifle and bayonet. Some of those in the village, who had been engaged in clearing the enemy out of the houses, had got somewhat scattered, until of one party only 15 remained together. When they saw that some of the enemy were established in one of our fire trenches just outside, they at once charged down the communica-

tion trench, led by their officer, and killed or captured all the Germans—40 in number.

In the house-to-house fighting, also, our soldiers distinguished themselves greatly. As an instance of the gallantry displayed one man attacked a house held by eight Germans single-handed. He fired at them and they returned the fire until, in order to get to close quarters he enlisted the help of two other men. The three men dashed forward through a storm of bullets, broke into the house and accounted for the eight occupants, four being killed and four led off in triumph as prisoners.

So many accusations of bad conduct, some only too well founded, have been brought against the Germans that it is a pleasure to be able to record of one of them an act of humanity. During the engagement at Givenchy one of our officers had been partially buried by the parapet of a trench which had been blown in on top of him. A German officer who saw him, regardless of the fact that he himself was out in the open under a hail of bullets, stopped to dig him out and give him brandy from his flask. To the great regret of those of our men who witnessed this deed of gallantry and self-sacrifice and deeply appreciated it, the German was killed by a chance bullet.

These two extracts from letters tell of the effect of six months of war upon the German population. The first is also a good example of the curious self-deception indulged in by the nation:—

It won't be long before they call up the Landsturm here, then I shall have to go too. They take almost everybody. I hope there will soon be peace, everything suffers now. Switzerland is also against England. Soon all will unite against her and her neck will be wrung. Work is bad here. Father and I are both on half-time. Soldiers on leave are carefully watched here in Barmen; they are not allowed in public-houses after 9 p.m.

The other, also from Barmen, is dated January 24:—

Everything is dear here, the price is almost double, only bread remains the same price, but there is no white bread, always this war bread and margarine. We are getting used

to that, but unfortunately work is very scarce. Uncle has nothing to do, leather is so dear that people are not having anything made. It is only in things for military use that trade is brisk, particularly the iron works.

Another letter found on a prisoner is significant of the tax being levied on the enemy's male population. The prisoner is a Volunteer 18 years of age, who was in the Obersecunda Class at school when the war broke out. The letter is from his brother, who states that the whole of his class has had to join a Jugendcompagnie except one of his comrades and himself, who are excused because they are only 14 years of age.

The following from an old soldier is amusing, but its ruthless criticisms can hardly have been encouraging to the recipient. It is dated December 12:

You have had luck to escape being taken prisoner. That the English have taken so many prisoners is incomprehensible to me as an old soldier. I can only attribute it to your short and bad training, and to many fourth-class shots, who blaze away without hitting anything; your short training makes me pity you, especially being sent against those hordes. It is, of course, nothing to do with you, and you are doing your duty, but the fault lies with the system, which is probably no better in the enemy's case. In the matter of leaders we are badly off, as those who know anything are soon killed or wounded.

XII

A BRIEF LULL

February 11, 1915.

The past three days have been the most uneventful we have experienced for several weeks.

On Monday, February 8, all was quiet on the British front, except for some rather severe shelling at certain points in the centre, where the enemy made use of incendiary shell, but effected little damage. In this quarter the activities of the enemy's snipers have diminished of late owing to the marksmanship of our sharpshooters. These snipers frequently cover themselves with ferns or straw so as to render themselves less easily distinguishable when crawling on grass or stubble. At one place on this day, out of five German snipers who had crawled out in front of their trenches and were trying to annoy us three were promptly shot dead. At another point one of our marksmen recently accounted for six, single-handed. Similar rounding up of snipers by our patrols is taking place on other parts of the front, and is an encouraging indication that this nuisance is being effectively dealt with.

South of the Béthune-La Bassée Road the French made a successful attack, capturing a point of some importance in the German line.

Tuesday, the 9th, passed equally uneventfully. At one or two points on the left of our line the Germans displayed unwonted friendliness by throwing cigarettes into our trenches; our men smoked the cigarettes while continuing to shoot at their loopholes.

In the centre the heavy shelling continued, but otherwise the enemy showed no activity.

Wednesday, February 10, was a very bright clear day with little wind, and the interest centred on warfare above rather than on the earth. A large number of aircraft on both sides hovered over the battle line, and there were many encounters in which our airmen maintained their usual superiority. The importance of this superiority can be imagined, for it means, not only that the enemy finds it difficult to discover the dispositions and movements going on behind our line, but also that his artillery is compelled to work entirely by the map instead of by direct observation. His gunners can, of course, tell by the map the exact distance of the target, but the range to be given the gun is a factor which varies with the condition of the atmosphere and the wind, and therefore cannot be definitely ascertained without direct observation, and even after the most careful calculations have been made, there is a possibility of error about this method which there is no chance of correcting. There is also a discouraging sense of uncertainty as to the effect produced.

Some places on our left and centre were heavily bombarded.

A party of our officers had an extraordinary escape on this day. They were on the point of sitting down to dinner in a dug-out when a bomb from a German trench mortar landed in their midst. When the smoke and dust of the explosion had cleared away the dinner had completely disappeared, but not a single man was hurt.

An incident recently occurred on the left which serves to show the nature of the present underground fighting. An old disused communication trench which led from one of our trenches towards those of the enemy had been blocked by us with a barbed wire entanglement. One night a party of Germans cut the entanglement. When this was discovered our men repaired it, and on the next night lay in wait in the hope that the enemy would come again. They were not disappointed. Six Germans came cautiously up the narrow trench to the entanglement and were all shot dead at point-blank range. The endeavour to get the better of the enemy in all sorts of little ways such as this makes up the daily life of the soldier.

The Germans have recently shown a desire to disabuse our Allies of the idea that they are maltreating prisoners. A few days ago an aeroplane dropped several notices in French not far from our lines. The translation is as follows:—

French soldiers! The very prevalent idea in your ranks that French prisoners are shot by the Germans does not conform with the truth. Quite the contrary, they are absolutely well treated by the Germans.

Unfortunately for Germany, the evidence as to the treatment in many cases of prisoners of war and the wild threats made in the Press to starve them in case of a shortage of food are not likely to remove the impression conveyed by this notice that "Qui s'excuse s'accuse."

Letters on prisoners continue to tell of the increasing strain of war and of the hatred of England as well as of the delusions cherished in Germany. Here are some examples:—

LAHR, *January 11, 1915.*

The place of the "Young German League" is now taken by the "Jugendwehr" (Cadet Corps, literally "Corps of Youths"), in which are incorporated youths of 16 years of age. They are commanded by officers and undergo military training, but have no arms. The Serbians and Montenegrins are now played out. The Russians, owing to their enormous losses, are no longer in the majority. The French are also no longer strong, and the Belgians cease to exist. Only the English now. These insolent dogs must be beaten. You can then come back and perhaps bring the Iron Cross with you.

ESCHERSHEIM, *December 13, 1914.*

Foodstuffs are very expensive here owing to the war. Thank goodness we have a good stock of potatoes and coal in the cellar. Petroleum is not to be had anywhere, and we have got a special spirit lamp.

January 16, 1915.

I write by candlelight as the Italians will not let any petroleum go through to Switzerland for fear the Swiss will give it to the Germans.

PFORZHEIM, *January 15, 1915.*

It is to be hoped that things will go better when the war is over, for if it goes on there will be many poor people here. In all Baden no town is so badly hit as Pforzheim.

December 30, 1914.

I can well believe what you write about the Ersatz troops. The men are trained for scarcely four weeks and then they go to the front. What can one learn in four weeks? I always think that is the reason for the heavy losses, as the men are still so helpless.

January 4, 1915.

‡ Hermann.—If you have no wood for your fires burn Englishmen's bones.

The following outburst from the *Hamburger Nachrichten* is interesting:—

“At last what we have so long hoped for is being done. England must be struck at the most vulnerable point. She must feel that she can no longer comfortably stand aside, and rob and cheat and practise every brutality, while she is represented on the European continent by mercenaries, the scum of her people, who play football with German bread,* and expose to their criminal tools of murder the valuable life of our healthy, gifted, and educated youth, the springtime hope for the future of our race. Our people are struggling and offering sacrifices for Emperor and Empire, for its existence and its future, and these things cannot be sacrificed to moral superstitions. What have we achieved in six months with our noble-spirited conduct of war? Calumnies and hate and bitter hostility everywhere.”

February 16, 1915.

On Thursday, the 11th, and Friday, the 12th, the lack of serious action on our front continued. There was on both days a certain amount of shelling of points near the centre of our line, and on the right our trench mortars did considerable execution on Friday.

On Saturday our guns on the right registered several hits on a bridge, and our line on the east of Givenchy was pushed forward somewhat to a more favourable position.

* For this crime five British officers were locked up.

On the extreme right our guns and infantry co-operated in an advance made by the French. The German guns were more active than usual against our centre and left.

On Sunday, the 14th, the German guns maintained a heavy fire along the greater part of our front. About 7 a.m. the enemy attacked our line a little to the south of the Ypres-Comines Canal and carried a short length of trench. This slight success encouraged them to make a second attack about 3 p.m. on the trenches to the south of their first objective. Here, too, they captured a small portion of our line, but in the night of the 14th-15th a counter-attack was organized and the enemy was driven out of all the trenches captured in the second assault, though he still retained possession of a trench about 80 yards in length which had been captured in the morning. In this fighting we took 13 prisoners, most of whom belonged to the 1914 class and appear to have only just arrived in the field.

During the following night, that of the 15th-16th, another counter-attack took place, and we regained the whole of our line.

Nothing of importance occurred during the day of the 15th. Our heavy artillery made some good shooting on the right; one shell landed full in a trench and is believed to have destroyed some 50 yards of it.

Some further details of the recent fighting in the La Bassée area are now available.

It will be remembered that on February 1, after recapturing a trench which the Germans had taken from us a few hours before, we gained by successive attacks two posts on the canal bank. As a matter of fact, one of these had been taken from us a short time before, and was not a German post as stated in the letter of February 2. In the first rush on the nearest work one of those unforeseen but dramatic incidents occurred which often imperil even the best laid schemes. As the storming party was on the point of dashing forward, just at the moment when delay might have been fatal, for it might just have given the enemy, who were much shaken by our artillery fire, time to recover, a man dropped a box

of hand-grenades, some of which detonated. For one instant there was bewilderment and some hesitation, no one quite knowing what had happened. Fortunately the officer who was leading the storming party rushed ahead, and his men followed him and carried the enemy's position at the point of the bayonet with very slight loss. After this the Germans were kept on the run. Our supports came up, and, passing through the first line holding the recovered trench, rushed the next post; then the party which had made the original assault advanced through these again and captured the second post.

During this fight one of our men showed the most conspicuous gallantry. Charging ahead of his comrades, he took up his position on a mound and shot several of the fleeing Germans at point-blank range as they ran past him. He then ran on up to a barricade, where two of the enemy were manning a machine gun, and kept them in play until the rest of our men came up and captured it.

In this quarter our infantry have gained an ascendancy over the enemy, which was well shown in the next series of encounters which took place among the brickstacks on the 6th. During the bombardment previous to the assault the Germans took refuge underground in their dug-outs, and our assault was so well timed and so sudden that when they emerged from their burrows they found our infantry on top of them. The result was never in doubt. Those who showed fight were at once bayoneted; but many recognizing the hopelessness of resistance threw away their arms and surrendered, some crying for mercy and offering their watches, money, cigars, or fruit in order to buy their lives.

One German officer was bayoneted as he was telephoning, presumably for reinforcements, and four Germans were killed by one of our men who was armed only with a shovel, as they were trying to escape past him down a trench. Amongst the spoils of war captured was a large amount of dum-dum ammunition and many cartridges in which the bullets had been reversed, with their bases outwards.

It is stated that when charging forward in this attack

our stormers maintained their dressing almost as if on parade.

In spite of disclaimers that the German activity on the Kaiser's birthday had no connection with that event, some people in Germany were evidently led to expect great successes on that anniversary. Here is a letter dated January 25 which was found on a prisoner:—

It appears that for the Kaiser's birthday there is going to be a great attack. All the aviators and all the Zeppelins will be let loose against France. On the one hand the engineers will do their utmost and on the other hand the artillery, and then a tremendous assault. Thus along the whole line the French will be "downed." You must write to us if this is true. Lie down in your trenches and do not put your head above the parapet; it will only be a target for the enemy.

XIII

FIGHTING SOUTH-EAST OF YPRES

(February 14.)

1

February 19, 1915.

From the 14th to the 17th February heavy fighting was almost continuous on our left.

This fighting has been of a most confused nature, for not only have both sides been engaged, as usual at close quarters, in a maze of trenches, but the country where it has taken place, in the neighbourhood of the Ypres-Comines Canal, is most intricate and difficult. There are many enclosures and small woods, and owing to the bombardment, which has continued for weeks and months past, the whole surface of the boggy clay soil has become pitted with shell craters and strewn with fallen trees, for, in course of time, heavy howitzer shell will sweep a wood as clean as if the trees had been blown down by a gale.

In these circumstances neither side can tell at any given moment exactly what the situation is nor what trenches are in its possession. In the ebb and flow of an engagement, in the course of continual attack and counter-attack, a trench may be gained at one point and lost at another, and, even in the case of a line of trenches which has been retaken, small bodies of the enemy may manage to maintain themselves in portions of it, and in the dark their presence may not be realized for a considerable time. All this renders anything approaching a detailed or connected account of what has happened impracticable at this stage. It is only possible to give the broad outlines.

The attack which began on the morning of the 14th

was undertaken by the Germans in some strength, but only the troops in the locality were employed, no fresh ones having been brought up., The local counter-attacks delivered by us were at first unsuccessful, but, as already recorded, during the night of the 14th-15th the whole line, with the exception of a trench about 80 yards in length, was regained. Some fighting continued around this point on the 15th, and during that night our line as a whole was restored. In the morning of the 16th the enemy's dead lay thick along our front, and on one road in the neighbourhood of St. Eloi 60 bodies were counted.

Meanwhile, between 1 and 2 a.m. on the previous night the enemy had attempted an attack some distance to the north of the canal which came to nothing. It was undertaken by about 80 men, who showed little determination and were easily driven back by our rifle fire. On the morning of the 16th one of our trench mortars did good work in this quarter, silencing a German mortar with the third round.

To return to events south of the canal. Although our general line had been restored, yet, in the course of the confused fighting, small bodies of the enemy, who had at one time or another established themselves at one or two points in our trenches, continued to hold out, and fighting was carried on round these points on the 16th, the enemy continuing to exert considerable pressure along this part of our front.

In the centre of our line, one of our anti-aircraft guns succeeded in hitting a German aeroplane, which barely succeeded in escaping to its own lines, where it descended hurriedly.

On the night of the 16th-17th, between 9 and 10 p.m., the enemy attempted an attack in a totally different quarter, in the neighbourhood of Richebourg St. Vaast, about three miles north of Givenchy. This was an isolated effort on the part of about 70 men, who withdrew after being fired at by our infantry.

On the 17th the heavy fighting on the left continued with even greater intensity, both to the north and south of the Ypres Canal.

In the morning an attack south of the Canal was repulsed, but, north of it, two of our trenches were stormed by the enemy after they had been blown in by mines. This success was, however, short-lived, for our men, gallantly returning to the charge, recovered the trenches, taking several prisoners. These trenches were found to be heaped with German corpses.

During this fighting the losses on both sides have been considerable, but ours are not heavier than might be anticipated from the character of the fighting, and, to judge from the number of German dead lying in the restricted area visible from our trenches, the enemy's casualties are greater than our own.

With reference to the uncertainty incidental to the present fighting, an occurrence recently took place which illustrates the kind of situation arising during the progress of an action from the nearness of the combatants to one another and from the fact that a trench may change hands several times in the course of a day.

Wishing to find out whether certain trenches had been occupied by our troops after a fight which had taken place during the day, two officers set out at night with a view to gaining touch with them should they happen to be there. They soon came on a communication trench which appeared to run in the required direction, and walked down it. The first thing they came upon was a dug-out with a candle burning in it and a quantity of German equipment scattered about. Thinking that this might have been captured, they continued their way down the trench, first, however, taking the precaution to blow out the candle.

Presently they came upon a trench running at right angles to the one they were in. No sooner had they entered it than they were challenged sharply in German, a shower of bullets followed, and a race ensued for the exit, both the pursuers and pursued floundering in the mud and dodging round the traverses. Fortunately the night was dark, and the Englishmen escaped unhurt after several minutes spent in the enemy's fire trenches, surrounded on all sides by Germans.

It can readily be understood that warfare of this nature imposes a great responsibility upon regimental officers and upon the rank and file, for higher commanders are necessarily unable to exercise close control over the development of an action. Direct communication with the firing line by daylight may be, if not impracticable, at least precarious, and telephone wires are liable to be cut by shells. Hence success depends pre-eminently upon the qualities of initiative, enterprise, and power of quick decision on the part of subordinate leaders and of the men themselves.

The campaign of hatred and abuse conducted by the Press and by public men in Germany against Great Britain is not without its effect upon the German soldiers, and there are signs that greater bitterness is displayed towards us than towards our Allies. This has been noticeable lately in attempts made to impress upon the French that the real quarrel is not with them but with the English. A few days ago, beyond our right flank, the Germans shouted to the French that they had no desire to fight them and that the English were their only enemies. The same thing happened on the left, where they threw messages into the French trenches to the same effect. Taken in connection with other incidents these actions are not without significance.

After the capture of the German position in the Quinchy brickfields a diary was found on an officer which contained a reference to an order stating that no prisoners were to be taken by the front line when attacking. The phrase was ambiguous, and did not necessarily mean anything more than that the attacking line was not to stop to take prisoners, but it allowed of another interpretation which, in view of the efforts made to inflame the soldiers against us, might easily have been adopted by them. In the case of the particular regiment referred to, suspicions are aroused by the fact that some time ago the Colonel gave orders that no English prisoners were wanted.

That these feelings are beginning to arise among the rank and file is not surprising when it is realized how

deeply the hatred and also fear of England have sunk into the minds of the German people. Often a phrase or sentence in a letter found on a prisoner startles the reader by revealing as in a flash a degree of frantic rage as when for instance a pleasantly written, discursive letter from Hanover about ordinary domestic matters, ends suddenly with the words: "God punish England." Another letter from Hanover displays a haunting fear that Great Britain's resources may wear out Germany in the end:—

"I fear that the English will make a start after Christmas (1914), when we have fought so hard against the French and Russians that we shall be able to do no more. Then this treacherous gang will appear upon the scene. Up till now we have not heard much about them."

The inundations along the course of the Yser River have had so great an effect upon the strategy of the campaign in arresting the march of the Germans upon Dunkirk and Calais that a word about the intricate system of dykes and locks which control them may be of interest.

All this region has, like Holland, in the course of centuries been reclaimed step by step from the sea. The average level of the plain is about two feet below sea-level at high tide. The passages, however, by which the sea can enter this plain are limited, for all along the sea-coast is a barrier of dunes which, as the sand blown by the north-west winds accumulates, are continually encroaching upon the low-lying country inland. This line of dunes is only broken here and there by a few streams flowing through them. The mouths of these streams are closed by locks preventing the entry of the sea at high tide and enabling them to discharge their waters at low tide. By this means the whole country has been gradually drained between the Yser and the Aa Rivers, for the rivers and streams have been connected by a network of canals and ditches. In order to inundate the country it is only necessary to open the locks at high tide. This is simple enough, but as a matter of fact the

scientific inundation of the exact extent of country which it is desired to render impassable to the enemy involves a high degree of skill and local knowledge in the manipulation of the locks with reference to the varying factors of tide and wind, and in the opening of particular dykes to flood certain areas.

It is an art possessed in its perfection by only a few old watermen, and it is said that it was due to the knowledge and experience of one of them that the Belgians were enabled to flood the German trenches while still keeping the water out of their own.

February 23, 1915.

The severe fighting south-east of Ypres, which had been in progress almost continuously for four days, ended on the night of the 17th-18th. In the course of that night we exploded a mine under the German trenches on the high ground north of the Ypres-Comines railway, and thus improved our position in that locality.

On the 17th the French north of Arras scored a brilliant success, capturing two lines of German trenches and causing great losses to the enemy.

The 18th passed quietly on the British front, but severe shelling was reported from various parts of the line, notably in the right centre. Here, in the course of the morning, the enemy bombarded several villages. About midday the cannonade died down, but when it recommenced in the afternoon the German batteries met with a very warm reception from our heavy artillery and were soon silenced. Similar attention was paid to the enemy's infantry; seven shells fell in one trench and another blew in a barrier which had been constructed across a road.

The extensive captures of German bombs and hand-grenades which have lately been made in the course of the fighting near Cuinchy have proved most useful, and the enemy's missiles were, during this night, turned against himself with great effect.

On the 19th, about 7 a.m., the French lines east of Ypres were attacked in some strength. Our men, listening to the sounds of battle to the north, could almost

tell from them the course of the engagement. Early in the morning the German batteries opened, and shortly afterwards their infantry were launched to the assault. Then clear and loud above the din came the short sharp "bark" of the *soixante-quinze* pouring a terrific hail of shells on to the area between the lines. The German supports would not face it and left the attacking line to be mowed down by the rifles of the French infantry. A few gallant men reached the defenders' trenches, but were at once driven out, leaving the ground littered with their dead.

In the evening a successful little affair took place at Givenchy. A heavy artillery fire was directed on the German trenches north-east of the place, after which our men rushed them, filled them in, and then returned to our lines, having suffered very few casualties in the course of the operation. The enemy showed some inclination to attempt a counter-attack in the neighbourhood of the La Bassée Canal, but our fire was too much for them, and the attack did not mature.

Several villages in the centre were heavily shelled during the day, but in the afternoon the German guns ceased firing owing to the fear of revealing their positions to our aviators, who kept the whole hostile line under observation.

Nothing of any importance occurred on the 20th beyond the usual artillery duel.

In the course of the night of the 20th-21st striking evidence of the effect of our fire was obtained in the neighbourhood of Neuve Chapelle. One of our patrols discovered a trench which had been abandoned by the enemy; they had left some rifles and many dead behind them. On this same night the enemy became again more active round Ypres. Our trenches were attacked south-east of Ypres and fighting proceeded for some hours; a small portion of a trench was lost, but the line was re-established a few yards to the rear.

Early in the morning of the 21st, about 6 a.m., a series of mines were exploded in one of our trenches farther to the north, and the Germans occupied a few yards of

it, but the attack which they attempted simultaneously on the neighbouring trenches was repulsed. Our line now runs round the portion that has been blown in and measures have been taken to render it untenable to the Germans, who have suffered heavily from our bombs, many of them having been blown bodily out of the trench.

The rest of the day passed quietly.

A few facts about the recent fighting south-east of Ypres can now be given. In order to realize what our troops have done in this locality the nature of the country must be borne in mind. To the south of the Ypres-Comines Canal the ground, although there are some enclosures, is comparatively open, but to the north of it there are many woods. In course of time these have become a vast "abattis," or tangle of fallen trees, interspersed thickly with *trous-de-loup* in the form of shell craters. To add to the hardships of such fighting the troops have been attacking on ground in which a man will sink up to his knees in mud. In spite of all these drawbacks, the counter-attacks were carried out with such resolution that in nearly all cases the original line was regained.

On the night of the 15th, as our troops were advancing to drive the enemy out of one of these trenches, his guns suddenly opened a tremendous fire. Our men were in the open at some distance from the Germans at the time, and being thus taken at a disadvantage their chance of success looked small. Without a moment's hesitation, however, the attacking line broke into the double and, pounding through the mud, burst into the German trench. Here one of those curious situations occurred where both sides remain in occupation of the same trench within a few yards of one another for a considerable time.

The counter-attack on the 17th was also a most dashing, piece of work. The trenches occupied by the enemy had been subjected to so heavy a fire that they would not await our onset. As our men charged forward cheering, the Germans were observed leaving the trenches and hurrying to the rear.

In one trench which had become in the course of the fighting more or less isolated, 40 of our men continued to hold firm until every one of them was either killed or wounded. Eventually there were only three left who were capable of firing, and these three continued to hold the enemy at bay. In the meantime word had been brought to those in rear that their ammunition was nearly exhausted, and seven men, the strongest available, were selected to bring up as much ammunition as they could carry. These latter found the three wounded survivors still standing amid the bodies of their dead and disabled comrades and still firing steadily. The support, slender as it was, came in the nick of time, for at that moment the Germans launched another assault, which, like the previous ones, was beaten off and the position was saved.

Our howitzers did especially good work on the trenches captured by the Germans. At one point our observers could see one lyddite shell after another bursting in the trenches and hurling the defenders into the air.

Attention has already been drawn to the confused nature of the present warfare, and the way in which both friend and foe have in the course of continual fighting become "sandwiched" in between one another. The war at the present stage has resolved itself into a struggle for the attainment of apparently insignificant objectives—it may be a mound here, a house there, perhaps only a brickstack or a heap of ruins which was once a cottage, but each one of these points, round which a desperate strife is waged from time to time, may make the whole difference to the security of some part of the line or may just afford us the means of placing the enemy at a disadvantage.

Those localities which have been continually taken and retaken, such, for instance, as the now famous brick-fields, present the strangest appearance. For several hundred yards in rear of the front trenches there is not only, needless to say, no living thing above ground, but there is not an object left standing which is not shattered in some way or other. Of the houses in the neighbouring village some retain their walls full of great irregular rents,

but of the roofs only a few rafters remain, with perhaps some tiles or slates still hanging to them and clattering down every now and then on to the roadway.

A more pretentious house than the rest, evidently selected as a target, has its whole front shot away, the church is gutted, and only one forlorn and battered saint looks down upon the ruins; even the trees have been torn to pieces by the iron hail, branches are shorn off, and the trunks are scored with the marks of shrapnel. One has a whole unexploded shell still sticking in it. All the ground near the front line is ploughed up with shells and furrowed with the remains of old trenches and graves. The whole place is a vast cemetery in which our trenches and those of the enemy wind in every direction. In a sheltered spot there is a little graveyard where some of our own dead have been buried, their graves carefully marked, and a rough square of bricks placed round them.

In front of the trenches the German corpses still lie thick. At one part of the brickfields recently some 30 men tried to rush our line. At their head was a young German officer, who came on gallantly waving his sword. He almost reached the barbed wire and then fell dead, and he lies there still with his sword in his hand and all his 30 men round him. It is the same all along the front in this quarter; everywhere the still grey figures can be seen lying, sometimes close together, sometimes singly, or in twos and threes.

This description might serve with a few minor alterations for many other localities along our front where fighting has centred round some wood or village or line of trenches. It is as if each had been swept by a withering blast before which every object, whether the work of nature or of man, has crumbled into ruins or become twisted and deformed, and even the very ground itself looks as if it had been shaken by a violent convulsion of nature.

There can be no doubt, judging from private correspondence, that the feeling in Germany towards the war is changing. They are probably as determined as ever to fight to the last, but the early optimism and confidence are vanishing. It would appear, also, that the drain upon

the enemy's manhood is having a depressing effect. It is reported that even *Ersatz* reservists who are suffering from ailments which should render them unfit for military service are being called up, and the supply of sound *Ersatz* reservists is exhausted in some districts. Some letters speak of the calling up of the untrained Landsturm, which represents a large reserve still available to make good the wastage of war.

Many prisoners' letters are eloquent of depression. Witness the tone of the following extract:—

BIEBER, *January 15, 1915.*

We are glad the holidays are over. As was expected they were dull and sad. In our everyday work we can forget the troubles which the war has brought and will still bring us. It is time to think of the end. Enough sacrifices have already been made, but there seems no prospect of peace. We also feel the war at home. Foodstuffs have disappeared. Flour is rare and one may not bake at night. Cakes, my own delight, may not be made. We should all be happy if the end came soon—misery increases day by day.

Another, however, dated January 28, is very different in tone, and betrays the old delusion that peace will soon be concluded with Russia:—

From Russia comes good news—"Praise be to God"—so that one may take it that it will soon be finished over there. It is not settled that you might have to go to Russia as reinforcements; we will hope for the best. Otto writes that it is not at all pleasant on the Russian front. The food is bad; every day bacon and peas.

This war has at different times been characterized as a war of high-explosives, a war of howitzers, a petrol war. As generalizations of a picturesque kind these descriptions are all true; but the last is probably the most accurate, both in depicting an actual state of affairs and pointing out the direction in which there has recently occurred the greatest change in the material side of the conduct of operations.

In two senses can the struggle on land be called a

petrol war. The employment of this substance in the internal combustion engine has rendered aviation possible and has also immensely simplified the work necessary for the supply of the army. Indeed, to such an extent has mechanical propulsion, whether of steam or petrol driven vehicles, especially the latter, taken the place of animal traction that the change caused may not unfairly be compared to the revolution brought about by the introduction of railways.

Now, within the field of operations, practically the whole of the conveyance of food, material and munitions beyond the railheads, or points to which they are taken by the railway, up to the refilling points, or points beyond which it is neither safe nor convenient to take motor-lorries, depends on motor traction and comes under the head of Mechanical Transport.

That which still depends on horse or mule traction includes what is known as First Line Transport, or the vehicles which carry all that is more immediately required by the troops, and follow them about in the field; the Second Line Transport or "Train," or in other words, the vehicles which convey supplies from the refilling points up as close to the firing line as wagons can be driven; most of the ammunition columns; some of the field ambulances; and a few miscellaneous vehicles. There is also a certain amount of mule pack transport. To realize to what extent an army is dependent on its motor vehicles it is only necessary to spend a day on the road anywhere within a few miles of the firing line. The number of long convoys of lorries which will be seen lumbering past or parked at the roadside well out of the stream of traffic will probably come as a revelation to the observer who sees them for the first time.

This is not the first campaign in which mechanical transport has been employed. In South Africa in 1899-1902 the British made use of steam traction engines for heavy work and of light motor-cars, which were then in their infancy, for mobile searchlights. In Manchuria, in 1904-5, it is believed that the Russians had a very few motor-cars, for the conveyance of the Staff, whilst

during the Balkan struggles of 1912-13 all sides used motor traction to a slight extent, its scope being much limited by the nature of the country and the absence of good roads. But this is the first campaign in which mechanical propulsion has practically replaced horse traction on the roads. That this change must occur was evident from the metamorphosis which had taken place during the last few years in peace traffic, and the General Staffs of most nations had taken measures to prepare for it. Since it was impossible for any Government to undertake the construction and maintenance in peace of the immense number of vehicles that would be required in war, the steps taken consisted in the main of subsidizing the users of certain classes of motors so that these vehicles might be designed and constructed in accordance with military requirements and be available in case of war. It was obvious also that their use would be very much simplified by the adoption of the principle of the standardization of types and the interchangeability of parts.

The mechanically propelled vehicles now in the Service include motor lorries or wagons of capacity varying from a few hundredweights to several tons, light box cars for the conveyance of rapid transit goods, motor ambulance cars, motor omnibuses for the quick transfer of troops from point to point, touring motor-cars for the conveyance of officers, motor bicycles and side-cars for scouts and dispatch-riders, travelling kitchens and steam tractors. The activities of the latter are mostly confined to the haulage of artillery and station work at the various bases, but the petrol-driven vehicles are to be seen everywhere. The number of the latter now serving the British Army in France amounts to thousands. The provision, manning, maintenance and running of this vast fleet of motors, with one or two small exceptions, as well as that of all the steam and animal transport, falls to the lot of the Transport Department, and the magnitude of the work entailed may be imagined.

To start with, the vehicles are dispatched from England as part of the original equipment of the Transport of

fighting units, or as "spares" for the replacement of casualties. The former proceed by road to the place of concentration of the formation to which they are allotted, and then start their life of utility in the service of that unit; and the latter go as far as the Mechanical Transport or "M.T." Parks, where they remain until required at the front. It may be as well to point out that in transport a park must not be confused with a depot. The former contains a stock of ready-made completed motors which can be issued at once. The latter contains stores of separate parts, and may include workshops. The present number of these parks will probably grow as the army grows in size.

The maintenance of the transport consists of the replacement of damaged vehicles by entirely new ones; the supply of spare parts to enable minor repairs to be carried out in the field; the extensive overhaul which can only be done in workshops, such as those at the bases, equipped to carry out heavy repairs.

In the replacement of entire vehicles there is little difficulty, provided that there is a sufficient reserve of them in the parks. The provision of spare parts, on the other hand, is a most complicated task, owing to the number of different types of vehicles in use, the great number of parts of which every vehicle consists, and the consequent difficulty of keeping in store a sufficiently large stock of spares at once to meet any demand. Briefly, the system of carrying out repairs is in practice as follows:—There are two kinds of M.T. Depots, Advanced and Base. The former are in the nature of retail shops which keep a small stock of the spare parts most in demand and issue them direct to units when required, demanding them when necessary from the Base Depots, which in turn obtain them from England when they are not in stock. These parts are then sent up by the Advanced Depot to the unit concerned, and the necessary repairs are made by the artificers of the mobile workshops which form part of every Transport unit.

In addition to the mobile workshops to execute general repairs of a minor nature there are tyre presses at different

points close up to the front, both stationary and mobile, the latter being installed on special railway trucks. By means of these presses the rubber on the heavy solid-tired wheels of motor-lorries can be renewed without the vehicles having to be sent down to the base. The more extensive repairs or overhauls are carried out at certain very large and completely equipped shops near the bases, where at present several hundred vehicles can be handled at one time.

To help those combatant units which have only a few mechanically propelled vehicles and are usually out of reach of the mobile workshops there are special mobile M.T. repair units which are despatched to the help of broken-down lorries or cars to put them in order on the spot. For the rescue of vehicles which are so badly damaged that they cannot move there is a "salvage" unit equipped with the necessary tackle for lifting and towing derelicts to the nearest railway station for despatch to the repair shops.

One of the chief obstacles in the way of the work at the Advanced Depot in furnishing "spares" is due to the fact that standardization not merely of parts but even of the names of parts is by no means complete. Another difficulty is that due to the inability of non-technical officers to describe sufficiently exactly what they require. For instance, a recent telegram demanded "two wheels for a motor-lorry made by —, a firm believed to have works in Blankshire." As this one firm turns out at least a score of different patterns of wheel it was not easy to comply with the demand.

Nothing can convey an idea of the magnitude and complexity of the maintenance and repair work of the transport better than a visit to a base. Here, in the M.T. Parks, will be seen rows of brand-new vehicles either ready to take the road or in process of being tuned up to do so. At the Depot, in the stores, will be seen stacks of tyres several feet high, with narrow alleys running between them, and rows of "zerebas" of packing-cases, each zereba being confined to the spare parts and accessories of one particular make of car or lorry. Within

these partitions are hundred of yards of pigeon-holes, often improvised out of empty packing-cases, in which the various articles are stacked and labelled, ready for issue. In one building there are dozens of clerks, busy sorting out, entering and checking demands. In another, probably a shed near the quay side, is collected the wastage of a campaign, scores of motor bicycles, mountains of wheels, tyres, horns, lamps. At another point are the workshops, where leather-aproned men in khaki are busy at forges, lathes, drilling machines, employed in the different kinds of metal work. The buildings in use vary from open sheds or *hangars* at the dockside to skating-rinks, cinema palaces, and even circuses; not the least interesting part of all that is to be seen being the way in which improvised accommodation is adapted to and made to serve the purpose of the army.

All this activity that goes on at the Bases and Advanced Bases may not be fighting; but it is very much modern war, and to it is due the efficiency and regularity of the Transport Service upon which the army depends.

February 26, 1915.

The past three days have been quiet and there is nothing, except comparatively unimportant details to record.

On the night of the 21st-22nd an accident apparently caused an explosion of one or more magazines in the German trenches near the Lys, north of Armentières, for a series of reports was heard and a portion of their line was enveloped in flames. The large stores of bombs and hand-grenades containing high-explosives which in this fighting have to be kept in the forward trenches may cause such accidents unless the utmost care is exercised.

During the afternoon of the 22nd sounds of cheering and ringing of bells were heard coming from the direction of Lille, probably due to the announcement of the recent German success in East Prussia.

On the night of the 22nd-23rd the enemy was rather more active on the left north of the Ypres Canal, but no attack was attempted.

On Tuesday, the 23rd, nothing occurred beyond some heavy shelling on the left.

Soon after nightfall one of our batteries on the right set alight to some star-lights and rockets in the German trenches. In the glare of this conflagration the Germans could be plainly seen trying to extinguish the flames. The opportunity was at once seized and a tremendous artillery and rifle fire was opened upon them which must have caused considerable loss.

On Wednesday, the 24th, the artillery on the right successfully shelled various houses frequented by snipers. The enemy's guns and trench mortars were very active on the left, north of the Ypres Canal, but little damage was effected.

Thursday was also entirely uneventful.

It has already been mentioned that on the morning of the 21st the enemy blew up a short length of trench east of Ypres and occupied some 40 yards of it. His efforts to advance beyond this point were prevented only by the coolness and daring of our officers and men. In order to check the enemy's onslaught a machine-gun detachment dashed forward into the open under a terrific fire, and brought their guns into action at point-blank range almost on the brink of the cavity caused by the explosion. A machine gun was also directed on the enemy's supports, who were thus prevented from reinforcing the troops in front. The German infantry attempted to advance down the communication trenches which connect the fire trenches with those in rear and also laterally along the fire trenches. At a turn in one of these narrow passages a sergeant and a private took their stand and held the trench alone and unaided against the on-coming Germans, shooting or bayoneting them one after another as they came round the corner.

In the confusion inseparable from such fighting one of our officers and a French corporal found themselves alone within a few yards of a trench held by the Germans. To go forward or back was impossible, so they threw themselves flat on their faces. Fortunately there was at this spot a slight dip in the ground, so that although their

presence was known to the enemy they were just out of reach of the German bullets, yet so close did these fall that both were scarred and bruised all over by the stones thrown up by the bullets on striking the ground. They lay there from 11 a.m. till 9 p.m. Then they crawled back to our lines.

The aspect of the narrow strip between the hostile lines in the woods round Ypres almost defies description. If the reader can imagine what a wood would look like with most of the trees either felled altogether or half sawn through and lying with their tops on the ground; if he can further imagine this wood standing in soft muddy clay in which every few yards there is a pit several feet deep; and if he can further picture to himself the whole of this tangle of dead vegetation, mud, and deep pits heaped from end to end with thousands of German corpses, the majority of whom have lain there since November, he will then gain some idea of the appearance of this awful zone of the dead that lies between us and the enemy.

In the immense battle front occupied by the Allies the daily record of isolated engagements which have centred round some village, hill, or wood conveys little idea of the meaning and purpose underlying these efforts, nor of the progress of operations as a whole. In order to afford a more comprehensive idea of recent operations it may be well to give a short summary of the main features.

From the time when the great attempt of the enemy to break their way through to the sea was finally abandoned in the middle of November, no serious effort has been made to penetrate our line, nor has any great concentration of German troops taken place on our front, and such activity as they have displayed may be described as merely that of an active defensive. In the last three and a half months the only heavy fighting has taken place on the flanks of our line, namely, in the La Bassée and Ypres areas. In order to understand this fighting it is necessary to have some idea of the topography of the country in these areas as well as to bear in mind the course of past events.

The town of Béthune stands on slightly rising ground,

but east of it there is a strip of very low-lying marshy country which extends northwards to the River Lys. About five miles east of Béthune the ground begins to rise again towards La Bassée. South of the Béthune-La Bassée Canal is the ridge on which stands the village of Vermelles. This ridge extends northwards towards the canal at Cuinchy, and is continued on the northern side by the high ground about Givenchy and Violaines.

It will be remembered that early in December the French took Vermelles and established themselves firmly on the ridge after the most desperate hand-to-hand fighting. After this the enemy made a determined attempt to capture the high ground north of the canal. This counter-stroke took place on December 19 after some German trenches had been seized by our troops. The enemy counter-attacked and followed this up by capturing some of our trenches in the neighbourhood of Festubert. He did not, however, succeed in establishing himself on the high ground about Givenchy. On more than one occasion his infantry forced their way into the village, but they were always driven out, and on December 22, when the fighting terminated, it was still firmly held, forming a kind of bastion jutting out into the enemy's line.

The Germans then devoted their attention to the part of our front south of Givenchy, where they tried to gain ground along the canal bank. A forward post held by us on the embankment changed hands continually during the first two weeks of the New Year, and a heavy bombardment was directed by both sides on the area south of the canal, the enemy's position in the railway triangle east of Cuinchy coming in for special attention.

The continued pressure of the Germans in this quarter culminated in the strong attack delivered on January 25 on the whole front from Givenchy to the Béthune road. So far as the high ground north of the canal was concerned this attack was an entire failure, but on the south of it a short section of our trenches was captured, without, however, any tactical gain resulting to the enemy from this partial success. Here the gallant stand of our men among the brickstacks checked the German rush, and

prevented them attaining any position whence they could endanger the rest of our line.

Four days later, on January 29, they made another most determined attack, confined on this occasion to the front south of the canal. It was repulsed with very heavy losses. This action marks the turning-point in the fighting in the La Bassée area, for from that time we have continued to make steady progress, the greater part of the ground lost south of the canal has been regained in a series of small actions and the position much strengthened. As these actions have already been described there is no need to refer to them here. Since February 7, when the Germans attempted a fruitless counter-attack along the canal bank, there has been no fighting in this area, while to the north of it we have regained some ground round Givenchy and established ourselves more firmly than ever on that ridge.

Let us now turn to the other area where fighting has been proceeding south-east of Ypres. It will be remembered that in the course of what is now termed the Battle of Ypres, which lasted from Monday, October 19, to Tuesday, November 17, our line had gradually been driven back all along the salient running round Ypres. Further south, also, the continued pressure of the enemy had forced back our weak line from the Château of Hollebeke, from Wytschaete and Messines, so that when fighting ended our line ran a little to the west or north-west of all these points.

Towards the end of November our troops in the trenches east and south-east of Ypres were relieved by the French, while a part of the line south of the Ypres-Comines Canal had been taken over by them earlier in that month. Subsequently the French gained some ground here and there, but substantially the line remains the same as it was in November when the fighting ended.

In order to understand the fighting in this quarter, where British troops are again engaged, a reference to a large scale map is necessary. The town of Ypres is situated on very low ground. North and north-west is the flat plain of the Yser valley extending to the sea. To

the north-east, east, and south-east there are a series of rolling and fairly well-wooded ridges falling gently down towards the hollow in which the town stands. About four miles due south lies the village of Wytschaete.

This village and that of Messines, about $1\frac{3}{4}$ miles to the south-south-east of it, are very prominent features in the landscape, for they stand upon a well-defined and isolated ridge dominating the surrounding country. Between this and the rolling wooded district east of Ypres runs the Ypres-Comines Canal, on the south bank of which stands the hill of Hollebeke, with its Château. Round this hill the canal takes a sharp bend to the south.

The British front along which the German attacks were made in October and November may, for the purpose of convenience, be divided into three sections. Firstly, the area due east of Ypres on both sides of the high road to Menin; secondly, the area south-east of the town on both sides of the canal; and thirdly, the Wytschaete-Messines ridge. Broadly speaking, the result of this fighting was to leave the enemy in possession of the higher slopes of the ridges in the area south and south-east of Ypres, but all his attempts at further progress were checked. The nearest point to Ypres attained by him was in the re-entrant south-east of the town along the canal bank, where the German lines approach within two miles of the old ramparts. It is in this district that his latest activity has been shown.

The German troops who undertook the recent attacks upon us in this quarter have shown some persistency. The attacks have not been carried out in masses, but by comparatively small bodies of men against those points where they evidently considered the best chances of success were offered. All the efforts of the enemy have, however, failed to advance his line in this area; he has merely occupied in two or three places short lengths of a trench. Our line runs round these points and close to them. The original attack on the 14th took place after fresh drafts had been received by the enemy, many of the men had never been in the trenches before, nor were they given warning that an advance was intended until

10 minutes before the time appointed for the assault. This fact would seem to show some distrust of the new levies who were going under fire for the first time.

This tendency of the enemy to use new troops for an attack before they have lost their ardour by a long period in the trenches has been shown in the fighting near La Bassée.

March 2, 1915.

During the last few days there has been little to record beyond further successes on the part of our artillery. There has been, however, one minor infantry action, which was brilliantly executed.

The British advance north of the Béthune-La Bassée Road, mentioned in the French *communiqué* as having taken place on the 25th, referred to the occupation of a line in that quarter somewhat more advanced than the one originally held. Our trenches had been at some distance from the enemy, and we have now worked forward closer to his lines. This gradual advance has not entailed any fighting.

On Friday, February 26, our guns maintained their superiority in the daily artillery duel. On the right centre, two German machine guns were knocked out by direct hits on the emplacements. On the left, south of the Ypres-Comines Canal, a hostile saphead was blown in by a shell and working parties who were trying to put up wire entanglements were dispersed by our fire.

On Saturday, the 27th, some snipers' posts were destroyed by our guns on the left. During the last few days our infantry have been active in this quarter: the enemy's efforts at sapping have been checked by bomb throwing and other offensive measures. In some of these saps and old communication trenches, which the enemy utilizes for the purpose of working forward, our patrols, who have shown great enterprise, have come upon many dead bodies. In cases where a few of the enemy have established themselves in the line of our trenches they have stretched wire netting across the top of the trench fixed at a slant so that the bombs will roll off. It may be

imagined what life under such conditions must mean for the occupants, cramped in a narrow excavation within a few yards of the enemy and under a perpetual rain of high-explosives.

In the early morning of Sunday, the 28th, a very dashing exploit was performed by a detachment from one of our battalions in the neighbourhood of St. Eloi, south-east of Ypres. A sudden attack was delivered on a German trench and 11 of the occupants were killed and five wounded. Our men then proceeded to fill in the trench and render it useless to the enemy. While this work was proceeding, another party advanced up the communication trenches and blocked them, repelling all the enemy's efforts to interfere with the work of destruction. When the work was thoroughly accomplished our men retired. So completely were the enemy surprised by this sudden and well-planned assault that we only suffered two casualties in capturing the trench. A few more were hit in the retirement, but the losses were very slight in comparison with the results gained. The whole operation only took 20 minutes.

Early on Monday, March 1, the enemy in his turn attacked one of our trenches near St. Eloi after a heavy bombardment with guns and mortars. The attack was repulsed with severe loss to the assailants.

In the course of months passed in the same trenches, and aided by the advent of drier weather, our troops have been enabled to effect great improvements in the trenches, and to introduce every sort of contrivance to render them more convenient, safer, and more accessible. In many places where the windings and turnings are most intricate and a stranger is liable to lose his way, signposts are placed at the points of junction and each passage and section of a trench is given a name, probably taken from the battalion which dug it or the officer who was in charge of the work. Very often the names selected are more pretentious; a plank pathway through a muddy wood will in all probability go by the title of "Piccadilly" or "The Strand"; a little log-cabin or a dug-out under a breast-work of sandbags will be honoured by the name of "The

Ritz " or " The Carlton." • White-washed posts are placed at turnings in order to serve as a guide at night. At places which are dangerous owing to their being commanded by snipers, warnings are posted up, so that the passer-by will know where to keep his head down. The occasional casualties which occur from time to time well behind the lines are often ascribed to snipers when they are really caused by random bullets, which on flat ground where there is nothing to intercept them often fall at a great distance in rear.

This work of improving the trenches is subordinated to the effort to gain every possible advantage over the enemy; but even in this respect long habit has produced some curious developments. Very often a kind of sporting element born of professional rivalry enters into the contest in sniping, and the rival sharpshooters will signal the results of their shots to one another with a flag. One sharpshooter watches his opportunity and fires; immediately over the top of the enemy's parapet appears a white flag which is waved from side to side signalling a miss. In spite, however, of this common bond of professional marksmanship, each knows well that one false move on his part will mean instant death at the hands of his unseen opponent. A great many of the attacks undertaken by both sides in the present stage of the war have as their object the capture of rising ground, which will enable one side to command or overlook the other. So far as the infantry are concerned a commanding position with an extended field of fire is the last thing desired, but for artillery action it is of the utmost importance to gain a position whence the enemy's trenches, batteries, and communications can be observed, and this provides the key to much of the fighting that is reported from time to time. The effect of artillery is now so great that it would be almost true to say that in many cases the infantry are used more as a screen for the guns than anything else. All offensive action is dependent for success upon the sustained and intensely accurate fire of artillery, necessitating a vast expenditure of ammunition. Artillery observers in some forward position on rising ground can observe the

effect of the fire, regulate it, and keep in close touch with all that is going on in front, while remaining in telephonic communication with the batteries in rear. The importance of this direct observation is shown by the fact that a great deal of the ammunition expended every day is directed on these observation posts, real or supposed, which are often most ingeniously concealed in the most unlikely places.

A prisoner who was captured recently confirmed the fact that the troops opposed to us in the Cuinchy brick-fields were demoralized after their reverse on February 6, and that they retired in disorder, abandoning their arms. On this account they were withdrawn to the rear and are still awaiting new arms. He also confirmed the suspicions entertained against the troops in that quarter and stated emphatically that they had been ordered not to take English prisoners. Furthermore, the efforts made to incite them against us have succeeded so well that officers and men now evince their detestation of us by formally saluting one another with the phrase—"God punish England."

It would appear that the Germans are not quite so well off for food as they were formerly. For the last few weeks, instead of getting one loaf for every two men, the bread ration has been reduced to one loaf for three men. On the other hand, the soldier is allowed to receive parcels from home up to a weight of 22 lb. instead of 11 lb. Since this source of supply must obviously vary in individual cases and its regular delivery can hardly be ensured in all circumstances, it would seem that many must be permanently dependent upon reduced rations.

There is a certain amount of sickness in the enemy's ranks, and the recruits suffer somewhat from swollen feet, although the high boots worn by the German soldier and the wooden clogs served out for trench work provide some protection against the wet. The older soldiers seem to have a poor opinion of the new recruits. Prisoners have also said that many of the German soldiers are so sick of trench life that they would surrender if they had not been told that the English shoot all prisoners cap-

tured singly. This, however, if true, does not mean that they are fighting with any less determination, and it does not alter the fact that many still express their conviction that all is going well, that the Russians are decisively beaten, and that the Western Allies will be crushed in three months' time. No naval news is ever given them. Such is the picture of the enemy's mental condition according to the almost universal testimony of prisoners.

It is satisfactory to note that most of them bear witness to the accuracy of our rifle and shell fire.

Frequently such extracts as these occur in diaries:—

“We were subjected to a severe shelling with high-explosive; fourteen killed in the first platoon and eight in the 9th Company.”

“The enemy shoots very well and has much artillery. It is to be hoped that we shall soon make a start, so that we can smash him to God knows where.”

The civil population behind the German lines lives in a state of abject servitude. They are compelled to mend the roads, to dig entrenchments, and to thresh corn, and in exchange for this work they are given ration tickets entitling them to draw Army rations. Without this they would starve, for all their cattle and food-stuffs have been commandeered. They are, however, allowed to sell wine and beer to the troops at a penny a glass.

March 5, 1915.

The only region in which during the last few days there has been any activity, other than that of artillery, has been to the south-east of Ypres. Here desultory fighting has been in progress conducted by small parties. In these our troops have consistently assumed the offensive. After the dashing exploit performed on Sunday, February 28, when a German trench was rushed and filled in, followed by the repulse of the enemy's counter-attack on Monday, March 1, a small body of our troops about midnight on the night of the 1st-2nd again forced their way into the German trenches near St. Eloi at a point where our line outflanked that of the enemy. They

fought their way forward in the darkness among winding passages until about 60 yards of trench had been gained, but their further progress was then checked by barricades defended by machine guns firing along the trench they were in and also along the communication trenches up which they tried to force their way. Our men clung on to this position most gallantly for some hours under a rain of bombs and hand-grenades, but as it was too isolated to hold permanently they withdrew in the morning of Tuesday. During this day further efforts to annoy the enemy were attended with success. North-east of St. Eloi our guns made such accurate shooting that the Germans bolted from their trenches, and our infantry, watching their opportunity, opened on them with rapid fire, causing heavy losses.

Further to the south our heavy howitzers bombarded Messines. The day was bright and clear, and owing to the prominent position of the village the result of the bombardment could be plainly seen. As each shell burst the village, with its old square church tower and red roofs, was blotted out in a cloud of smoke and red dust caused by the shattering of bricks and tiles. The effect of high-explosive detonating among buildings is tremendous and does not depend upon the damage caused by the actual splinters of the shell, which is comparatively small, but upon the fact that every brick and stone, in fact, all solid objects within a considerable radius, become death-dealing missiles which are hurled for hundreds of yards in every direction.

The astonishing strength of many of the old medieval buildings in this country, such as the Templars' Tower at Nieuport and the church tower of Messines, is evinced by the fact that they have resisted bombardment by modern artillery. The latter is, of course, in a more or less ruinous condition as a result of the German bombardment four months ago; great blocks of masonry have been blown off it, the belfry has been shot away, the interior is completely burnt out, but the framework, though irregular in outline and full of gaping holes, still stands defiant amid the surrounding ruins. The church

contained a very fine oak screen in the centre of which was a life-size plaster crucifix. When the British evacuated the place, on October 31, the German shells had set alight to the woodwork, which was completely burnt, and everything in the church destroyed with the sole exception of the crucifix, which was not touched.

Ypres was somewhat heavily bombarded by howitzers during the day.

On the night of the 2nd-3rd a detachment of our men crept forward to the German trenches near St. Eloi, and threw bombs at a working party of the enemy, dispersing them, and effectually putting a stop to the work.

On Wednesday, the 3rd, there was an increase in the shelling at many points of our front. In the centre it was especially severe. Here our artillery effected considerable damage. To the south of the Lys several houses tenanted by the enemy were destroyed, and the occupants could be seen running from them. A hostile battery was silenced in the same neighbourhood, and several trenches blown in. There is little doubt that the enemy suffered considerably, for after the bombardment stretcher parties were seen moving about in this area.

On Thursday, the 4th, the increase in the shelling was maintained on both sides, but nothing of importance occurred.

In the fighting on our left our offensive measures have been aided by the daring and enterprise of our patrols. An exciting encounter took place in the dark a few nights ago between one of our patrols and a German listening patrol. The two parties went for one another with the bayonet and a hand-to-hand struggle ensued. In spite of the fact that the sounds of the scuffle brought other Germans from the trenches to the support of their comrades, our men not only held their own but withdrew successfully, carrying off with them several articles of German equipment and leaving two of the enemy dead on the ground.

A description has already been given of the districts round Ypres and La Bassée, which have been the scenes of recent fighting. Between these two areas there are

various localities which are of interest, owing to their tactical features and the fighting which has proceeded there at different times. The line held by the British is divided roughly into two equal portions by the River Lys. The character of the country north of the river differs greatly from that lying to the south of it, and this difference has an important bearing upon the fighting which took place in October and November.

North of the river the ground is broken and rolling and there are several commanding heights.

About three miles due north of Armentières is the large Bois de Ploegsteert, flanked by the two villages of Le Gheer and St. Yves to the east of it. North of the wood the ground rises steeply up to Hill 63, which is really a spur of the long ridge running eastwards from Neuve Eglise and forming the watershed between the Lys valley and that of the little River Douve. To the north again of the Douve rises the Wytschaete-Messines ridge.

The country to the south of the Lys can be described in a few words. It is a flat, water-logged plain, drained by the little stream of the Lawe, sloping gradually upwards to the low ridge on which stand the villages of Givenchy, Aubers, Fromelles, and Radinghem.

In our advance between October 13 and 20 we encountered a most stubborn resistance in the area south of the river, for every farmhouse and hamlet became a little fortress, and the numerous hedgerows and ditches offered great facilities for defence. Artillery action was hampered by the absence of any commanding ground whence observation of fire could be obtained, and the church towers had for the most part been destroyed. Nevertheless we had gained a footing on the ridge when the pressure of the enemy's masses compelled us to fall back to the position we now hold in the low ground. The enemy's efforts in this quarter were then confined chiefly to an attempt to capture Armentières by driving in our line south of the town, but after a very heavy attack on October 29 he desisted from these attempts, and attention was concentrated almost entirely on the area north of the river.

Besides attacking the Wytschaete-Messines ridge the most desperate efforts were made to storm the villages of Le Gheer and St. Yves, and so obtain a footing in the Ploegsteert wood and on the slopes of Hill 63. All these efforts were, however, foiled, and the final result of the fighting was to leave us in the position we now hold.

Our line runs from the river a little south of Frelinghien through Le Touquet, Le Gheer, and St. Yves; it then turns sharp to the westward round the foot of Hill 63 for about a mile, and then turns northward again, circling the Wytschaete-Messines position, which represents a great wedge driven into the centre of our line whereby the enemy has placed himself astride of the direct road from Ypres to Armentières. All this district, unlike the blind country south of the river, is of great interest, for it presents many prominent features, the tactical value of which is obvious when the importance of artillery is borne in mind. It is also possible to obtain a view over great stretches of the country, and thus gain a more comprehensive idea of the relative positions of our line and that of the enemy.

March 9, 1915.

Comparative quiet has prevailed on the British front during the past few days.

During the night of March 4-5, some fighting took place on our left east of Ypres. It will be remembered that on February 21 the Germans exploded a mine under one of our trenches and occupied about 40 yards of our line. Since that date we had been engaged in our turn in counter-mining, and on the evening of the 4th our mine was exploded, killing practically every man in the trench. An assaulting party then stormed the position with the bayonet, while others followed with bombs; the communication trenches were blocked with sandbags, and barricades were also erected across the ends of the portion we had gained. After a conflict with bombs, bayonets, and machine guns had raged around these barricades for some hours in the darkness, we evacuated the trench, having rendered it untenable for the enemy. The garrison

had been about 25 men, who were probably all killed except four, who were taken prisoner.

On the morning of Friday, March 5, the French concluded their operations in the neighbourhood of Notre Dame de Lorette, some distance beyond our right flank, whereby all the trenches lost by them on Wednesday were retaken and heavy losses inflicted on the enemy, including nearly 200 prisoners and several machine guns.

On the British front there was considerable shelling about Neuve Eglise and Ploegsteert in our centre, but no action of any other kind took place.

On Saturday, March 6, a vigorous and sustained bombardment of the German trenches on our left, in the neighbourhood of St. Eloi, was carried on throughout the day. The effect was considerable. The shells could be seen bursting in the trenches and blowing away parapets, and cries and groans were heard. One German soldier, unable to stand it longer, ran towards our lines holding up his hands and surrendered.

In our centre the heavy shelling was maintained. In this area many incendiary shells continue to fall. On our right there was also a severe cannonade, both from our guns and those of the enemy.

Sunday, the 7th, passed quietly. The village and neighbourhood of Wytschaete were in the course of the day bombarded by one of our heavy howitzers with great effect. So dense were the columns of smoke and dust which rose hundreds of feet into the air that, although a strong breeze was blowing, they hung like a pall over the village for a quarter of an hour before dispersing.

Owing to the accuracy of our artillery fire, the enemy has been showing great nervousness at certain points on our left centre during the last few nights. Rapid rifle fire has been opened by the Germans from time to time, which, however, has generally ceased after a few rounds from our guns. Searchlights and flares have also been much used by them to light up the surrounding country and give warning of an attack. Our patrols have taken every advantage of this situation to molest the enemy and afford him no rest. They crawl up and throw hand-

grenades among the German working-parties, give them no respite from sniping, fire rifle-grenades into the trenches, and have in general contrived by these means to establish so great a superiority that while no German can show himself, our men can expose themselves with comparative immunity.

The following extract from captured correspondence is typical of a good many now being found. Such passages are significant as showing a realization that the end of the war is not in sight, but as yet they evince no loss of determination to see it through and no complaints are made:—

MULLINGSEN, 30/1/15.

“We know very little about what is happening except what is in the newspapers, and they only tell us the good news. We never hear of the bad news. What one reads in private letters is terrible; the end of the war does not seem to be in sight. George will probably have to serve too, as they are taking everyone who is able to walk to the Railway Station.”

A good many statements have been made at different times about the condition of the enemy's moral, which may seem to be of a somewhat conflicting nature. It will be well, therefore, to make certain facts respecting this very important matter quite clear. It is true that the evidence of individual prisoners has from time to time presented a picture of extreme depression prevailing in the enemy's ranks, of large numbers only restrained from surrendering by the fear of their officers, of officers who refused to lead their men in the attack, and of machine guns and revolvers being used as the only effective means of inducing the troops to advance.

Now there is probably a basis of truth in all these statements. In all armies the quality of units varies considerably, and this is especially true at this stage of the war, when many partially trained troops are being used in a form of fighting which involves an intense strain on the individual; but as a picture of the general condition of the enemy's *moral* this description is misleading, and, indeed, most dangerous, for it may produce the impres-

sion that the enemy is virtually defeated already and that victory can be achieved by the Allies without the necessity of the greatest sacrifices of which we are capable.

The plain truth is that, although the enemy's effectives in the West are much reduced in comparison with those possessed by him some months ago, and although ours are increased, he is still holding an enormous extent of front here, whilst carrying out operations on a huge scale in the East, and in spite of these gigantic efforts no signs of weakening are yet visible in the *moral* of the German troops taken as a whole. Nor, if we put ourselves in their place, can we fail to see that there is as yet no reason why an intensely brave, determined, and well-organized army like that of the Germans should feel discouraged.

The Kaiser can choose at will a Russian, a Belgian, or a French town in which to make a triumphant appearance in the presence of his troops. They are fighting in an enemy's country, ruined and devastated by the passage of their armies. The falsehoods told them by their superiors, the tales of victories in the Press, have all produced an atmosphere of complete illusion. Their enemy appears to them to be exhausted and engaged in a last despairing effort to delay the inevitable decision. In any estimate of the present value of our enemies as fighting men, we must not lose sight of the national sense of discipline which forms part of the earliest education of every German. It enables them to gain results with raw troops which, among us, could only be gained after months of continuous training, and to maintain an extremely high level of efficiency, even after suffering great losses in the commissioned and non-commissioned ranks, for obedience has become ingrained in the people; it is in the very fibre of the nation.

It is difficult for British people to realize what a national war means to a Continental nation. Every man, woman, and child is doing his or her part. When the men go to fight, the women and children carry on their work at home. Thousands of them can be seen any day in the fields. They are ploughing and sowing and herding sheep and cattle. All their thoughts and energies are directed

to one end. All are living under a great cloud in the shadow of which it would seem utterly incredible to them that any individual should cease working for the common good in order to gain any personal advantage or increase of leisure, and still more that any one should give a thought to the ordinary pleasures and enjoyments of peace. Such is the spirit in which Germany is facing this struggle.

No doubt economic and other factors have had a great effect upon the civilian population in Germany, and there is a very marked difference between the expectations with which they entered upon the war and those they now cherish, but it is impossible to say that either they or the army have yet definitely lost confidence in ultimate success. This confidence will only be overthrown and the *moral* of the troops will only be shaken by the consciousness of crushing defeat in the field. But this end can only be attained by ever-increasing pressure of vast numbers of men and guns throughout the coming months.

XIV

NEUVE CHAPELLE AND ST. ELOI

March 12, 1915.

The last few days have witnessed an offensive movement on our part on a somewhat extended front which has been attended with signal success.

Monday and Tuesday, March 8 and 9, passed very quietly, the only thing worthy of notice being the excellent work done by our patrols along the left and left centre of our position; bombs, rifle-grenades, and sniping have all been used with such effect that a definite mastery over the enemy in this quarter has been gained. On the night of the 9th a feeble attack was delivered by about 80 of the enemy on our trenches near St. Eloi. They retired, leaving several of their number dead on the ground.

On the morning of the 10th offensive operations were undertaken in the neighbourhood of Neuve Chapelle.

It is obvious that it would not be desirable, even if it were possible, to enter into too great detail in describing operations which are still in progress. The broad outlines can alone be given. In order to understand the nature of these operations and the extent of the success achieved it is necessary to have a clear idea of the line held by us south of the Lys previous to this advance.

Starting with the left, the line rests on the river north-west of Houplines. From this point it runs in a slight curve round Armentières to Bois Gernier. From here it runs, or rather did run, in a south-westerly direction almost straight to the cross-roads about 1,000 yards due west of Neuve Chapelle. It then ran south to Richebourg-l'Avoué, passing east of this place, whence it con-

tinues southwards, passing west of La Quinque Rue and a little distance to the east of Festubert. From this point it curves eastwards again round Givenchy.

A glance at the map will show that Neuve Chapelle lies at the junction of two main roads. One is the road from La Bassée to Estaires and the other is the principal road, among a perfect network of other roads, leading *via* Croix Blanche and Fleurbaix to Armentières. In the neighbourhood of Neuve Chapelle these roads form an irregular diamond-shaped figure. Our original line lay along the two roads forming the western sides of the figure and the German line lay along the eastern sides, the village itself being situated at the apex of the latter.

From the foregoing description it will be seen that the part of the line about Neuve Chapelle and to the south of it represents a re-entrant, so far as the British are concerned, Neuve Chapelle being the northern corner of this re-entrant.

At 7.30 a.m. on the 10th the battle began with a bombardment by a large number of guns and howitzers. Our men in the trenches describe this fire as being the most tremendous both in point of noise and in actual effect they have ever seen or heard. The shrieking of the shells in the air, their explosions and the continuous thunder of the batteries all merged into one great volume of sound. The discharges of the guns were so rapid that they sounded like the fire of a gigantic machine gun. During the 35 minutes it continued our men could show themselves freely and even walk about in perfect safety.

Then the signal for the attack was given, and in less than half an hour almost the whole of the elaborate series of German trenches in and about Neuve Chapelle were in our hands. Except at one point there was hardly any resistance, for the trenches, which in places were literally blotted out, were filled with dead and dying partially buried in earth and *débris*, and the majority of the survivors were in no mood for further fighting.

To the north-east of the village, however, a body of Germans ensconced in some enclosure still continued to hold out for a few hours; three attacks, in spite of the

extreme gallantry with which they were conducted, failed to dislodge them; but by about noon the arrival of reinforcements drove the Germans from their last stronghold in the village. This part of the fighting was remarkable for the manner in which every part of the attacking line afforded one another mutual support.

Meanwhile, on the right from the direction of Richebourg, a similar advance had been made towards the Bois du Biez, a small rectangular wood lying about 1,000 yards south-east of Neuve Chapelle. Here, also, little resistance was met with and our line reached a point about 400 yards from the wood. In the afternoon the troops who had seized Neuve Chapelle advanced still further to the east, gaining nearly 400 yards, while on their left again, north of the village, our forward movement progressed for a considerable distance and fighting continued long after darkness had set in.

The enemy were by this time thoroughly shaken and in some parts of the field were surrendering in groups. Throughout the day the Germans continued to hold out in a strong position at the angle of the cross-roads south of the village, where they were established in a perfect network of trenches and barbed wire. This position had been known as "Port Arthur," and a hard struggle raged for some hours around it, until, at 5.30 p.m., it was stormed at the point of the bayonet. By nightfall we were in possession of all the enemy's trenches on a front of 4,000 yards, representing an advance of more than 1,200 yards from our original trenches at the furthest point. The number of prisoners captured was officially reported to be 750, but there is reason to believe that others were taken who have not yet been sent in.

During the day two remarkable feats were performed by our airmen. One, flying at a height of only 150 ft. in order to make sure of his mark, dropped a bomb on the important railway bridge at Menin, destroying one of the piers. Another, flying over Courtrai Railway Junction, dropped a bomb on the station and completely wrecked it. These are both points of vital importance on the German communications.

The German batteries ^{on} ~~on the~~ day made no effective reply to our artillery fire.

On Thursday, the 11th, the fighting continued almost as fiercely as on the previous day. The enemy attempted counter-attacks at various points, and especially from the Bois du Biez, but our guns opened on the wood with so much effect that the Germans would not emerge from its shelter. A little ground was gained at various points, but on the whole the situation remained very much the same as on the previous day; the enemy's resistance had stiffened, but all his efforts to drive us from the positions we had gained were repulsed with loss.

The German artillery had now become more active, Neuve Chapelle was heavily shelled, and the whole line was swept with shrapnel.

It is difficult to give an idea of the result of this striking success upon the men. They have been paying off old scores. They have now inflicted on the enemy something of that ordeal which he inflicted upon us in the earlier stages of the war by dint of superior numbers and weight of artillery.

The enemy for the time being was beaten and on the run. It was the consciousness of this which filled the hospitals and the ambulances with the cheeriest crowd of wounded ever seen there.

If any further proof of this were wanted it could be found in the spectacle of an Irishman shot through the chest recounting his experiences to a delighted audience in a stentorian voice audible in the furthest corner of a large clearing hospital; it would be found also in the sight of the groups of injured men on the roads talking and laughing as they limped back out of the firing line.

The columns of prisoners, as they marched back threading their way through the ambulances and transport, and between the waiting ranks of our reserves, afforded no little encouragement. Many of their faces were bright yellow in colour from the effects of lyddite; the majority looked shaken; all admitted that the attack had come as a complete surprise.

Our success does not lie in the fact that we have gained

an extent of ground probably greater than has ever been gained in the space of so short a time since the commencement of the present form of trench warfare, but that our men, in spite of the disheartening effects of months of inactivity in the trenches, have shown the utmost dash throughout these operations. They have had to advance over very deep ground under heavy fire, carrying a very heavy weight of equipment and tools, yet no task has proved too great for them.

All the wounded have borne testimony to the extraordinary devotion and gallantry of the regimental stretcher-bearers and the bearer parties, who have worked till they dropped from sheer exhaustion under the hail of shrapnel and machine-gun fire which swept the open fields during the advance.

March 16, 1915.

On the 11th, as has been described, the action round Neuve Chapelle had assumed the form of incessant efforts on the part of the enemy to regain what they had lost, the only result of which had been to enable us to make slight further progress here and there as they were beaten off. During Friday and Saturday, the 12th and 13th, the severe fighting continued.

On the morning of the 12th the German counter-attacks were renewed along the whole front round the village and to the north of it. These again resulted only in great losses to the enemy, who also left many prisoners in our hands. By this time the Germans were beginning to show signs of great exhaustion, and on more than one occasion the men of the attacking line lay down and held up their hands when we opened fire. Near the cross-roads south of the village, in front of the locality known as "Port Arthur," which we had taken the day before, about 70 of the enemy who had got into a communication trench were captured in a body. It was only at one point, north-east of the village, that they reached our trenches; but we at once drove them out, and pursued them towards their own lines, taking many prisoners.

As the hostile attacks grew more feeble our infantry pressed on and gave the weary enemy no rest. They

stormed a strong position in some houses on the left near the Moulin du Pietre (Pietre Mill), and a party of about 50 armed with bombs rushed a trench and took 80 prisoners. As the afternoon wore on the resistance of the Germans weakened, and in some cases entire companies surrendered. Many of the men were completely exhausted. They stated that their trenches were full of water, that all their officers had been killed, that whole battalions had been destroyed, and that they had been for days without food. The latter, no doubt, was due to the impossibility in the confusion of the fight of getting up rations to the firing line.

These surrenders cannot be considered to reflect discredit on the troops concerned, for they fought most gallantly. But the strain must have been terrible. They had been taken by surprise, and had then been fighting for three days against an enemy superior in numbers and—what is more important—greatly superior in artillery. The effect of our bombardment may be judged from the fact that on the 10th, when our men had approached the German trenches in front of Neuve Chapelle, some of the survivors had crawled painfully out and knelt on the ground, holding up their hands, utterly dazed. The village itself had been converted into a shambles, and remained a medley of ruins thickly strewn with corpses.

And yet, in spite of this, on the 12th, in certain localities, the Germans continued to hold firm and resisted with the utmost determination. They made special use of houses so situated that from them the ground could be swept by the fire of machine guns, and in some cases placed as many as half a dozen of these weapons in one building. These had to be taken one by one after desperate fighting at close quarters.

The net results of the operations in this quarter on this day were that not only had our original gain of ground been maintained against repeated counter-attacks, but that further progress had been made by us at some points, notably to the north-west of the village, and that we had captured over 600 more prisoners. By nightfall the German dead lay thick all along our front. Opposite the

sector south of the village there were more than 2,000 bodies, and in front of one battalion east of the village were stretched 500 more. The ground in these places slopes upwards from our trenches towards the enemy, and the corpses could be plainly seen and counted. These figures do not include the large numbers killed in the village of Neuve Chapelle itself, where many bodies lay buried amongst the ruins and hidden by fallen masonry, nor behind the line occupied by us.

Another success was obtained on this day to the east of Armentières, at a little hamlet called l'Épinette. By a sudden attack with bombs we gained with trifling loss a position about half a mile in length, representing an advance of about 300 yards from our original trenches. On the night of the 12th-13th the Germans attempted to retake this position by attacks carried out by parties of bomb-throwers, but they were all repulsed.

During the night a curious device of the enemy was discovered. One of our patrols on the left came upon a dummy figure stuck in the ground in front of the German trenches. Upon being moved the figure exploded, injuring one man. This was doubtless a "booby-trap" prepared by some man accustomed to handling explosives.

On the 13th the fighting at Neuve Chapelle was much of the same nature as it had been on the previous day, consisting of further counter-attacks by the enemy, this time backed up by a severe bombardment. Strong German reinforcements taken from many units had been arriving continuously since the 10th, and these troops were thrown into the fight as they came up. We had consolidated our position during the course of the night, however, and the enemy's efforts were easily beaten back. At no point did they succeed in penetrating our trenches. In the afternoon a strong counter-attack was set in motion from the Bois du Biez, but our guns played such havoc in the enemy's ranks as soon as they attempted to debouch from the wood that the attack melted away. More prisoners continued to fall into our hands, and by the evening of this, the fourth day, they amounted to 1,700.

During the 12th and 13th our airmen carried out raids

on the railway junctions at Don and Douai; considerable damage was effected at both places, and at Don a portion of a train was destroyed.

On Sunday, March 14, there was practically no fighting round Neuve Chapelle. Our line was now firmly established and the enemy made no further attempt upon it. His efforts were instead directed in a fresh quarter. In the evening an extremely heavy artillery fire was concentrated on our line round St. Eloi, and between 5 and 6 p.m., after blowing up one of our trenches, the Germans assaulted and occupied the village and some trenches both to the north and south of it. A counter-attack was organized by us early the next morning, about 3 a.m., and the village and the whole of the trenches, except for one post south of the village, were recaptured.

The work of our artillery during the last few days has been very effective. On the 10th the railway station at Quesnoy, east of Armentières, was shelled just as some hostile reinforcements were entraining for the scene of action. Prisoners since captured have admitted that the fire caused many casualties. On the same day the fire of one of our heavy howitzers was directed on to Aubers with somewhat remarkable results. Suddenly a tower in the village, which was a prominent feature in the landscape, was seen to be projected skywards, to dissolve in mid air, and to descend in a cloud of dust.

Prisoners who had been all through the war stated that they had never experienced such a bombardment as that which preluded the assault on Neuve Chapelle. Many were still taking refuge in their dug-outs when our troops reached their trenches, and in the village several were captured in cellars before they had realized that we were upon them. One wounded Prussian officer, of a particularly offensive and truculent type which is not uncommon, expressed the greatest contempt for our methods. "You do not fight. You murder," he said. "If it had been straightforward, honest fighting, we should have beaten you, but my regiment never had a chance from the first; there was a shell every 10 yards. Nothing could live in such a fire."

This feeling of resentment against our artillery was shown by several of the prisoners. Gratifying as it is to our gunners, it is an exhibition of a curious lack of any judicial sense or even of a rudimentary sense of humour on the part of the apostles of "Frightfulness." It was the Germans who prepared an overwhelming force of artillery before the war, and they were the first to employ the concentrated action of heavy guns in field warfare. When the tables are turned and they have their first taste of what we have often eaten they actually have the effrontery to complain. It also especially galled our prisoners that they should have been captured by the British, who, they had been informed, were very inferior enemies.

In spite of the exhaustion of many of them, their aspect on the whole said a great deal for the discipline and order prevailing in the enemy's ranks. Considering the conditions under which they had been living in the trenches, both their clothing and their persons were extraordinarily clean, and most of them were shaved. As soon as possible all busied themselves cleaning their clothes and rubbing the mud off. Indeed, their chief care seemed to be to make themselves smart.

They are almost unanimously optimistic as regards the situation. The idea prevalent still is that the Germans are going to finish with Russia first—which will not take long—and then with the whole of their forces will undertake the easy task of crushing France and Britain. And they express unbounded admiration for Field-Marshal von Hindenburg, who is a national hero. One officer stated that three German princes, including Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern, were serving with one of the battalions in Neuve Chapelle, and that he believed all three were killed.

One important feature of the recent success, small though it may be in actual extent, is the proof it has given of the spirit of our men. Not only did they carry out the attack with the greatest dash and gallantry, but after days and nights of incessant fighting, during which they have often had to lie out for hours exposed to heavy fire, and in spite of the severe losses they have sustained, they

display little signs of the 'strain.' The companies, weakened though they were, swung cheerily through the villages on the way back from the trenches carrying "*Pickelhauben*" and other trophies. Even those who had had the longest spell of fighting were fit for anything after one night's rest.

Great indignation was expressed by the men of one battalion, who considered that they had had peculiarly bad luck, the memory of which rankled. They had settled down to eat their dinners during a lull in the battle, and a rum ration had just been served out when a German party attacked them with bombs and forced them to evacuate the trench. The fury of their counter-attack made a few minutes later was unequalled, and they not only retook the trench, but made a large haul of prisoners. There was, however, little left of the dinner and nothing of the rum.

In the fighting which has taken place during the past week our losses have, of course, been heavy; but at a moderate estimate those of the enemy cannot be far short of 18,000, exclusive of prisoners. That they were great is corroborated by the statements of many prisoners.

March 19, 1915.

Since the action of St. Eloi on the 14th and 15th there has been no fighting on our front. That action has been somewhat eclipsed by the story of Neuve Chapelle, but although it was of comparative unimportance, since it left the situation very much as it had been before, it gave equal proofs of the fighting qualities of the British soldier.

The village of St. Eloi lies at the junction of two main roads, one the road from Ypres to Armentières, the other the road from Ypres to Warneton. Our line runs close round the village on the east, and on the south side of it bends away westward, so that the enemy may be said roughly to face the village on two sides. To the south-east there is a large mound, or tumulus.

On the evening of Sunday, the 14th, after an extremely heavy artillery fire directed against our trenches along the

eastern and south-western sectors, the Germans endeavoured to rush our line. This attempt succeeded so far as the latter sector was concerned, for the trenches had been blown in and were absolutely untenable. To the east of the village, however, our infantry made a most determined stand. Their fire was so steady and well directed that the losses among the assailants were terrible, our men sticking to their posts till the last—in fact, till they were overwhelmed by sheer weight of numbers.

The Germans then rushed the support trenches and also the mound, which they had blown up by a mine, and, following up their success, penetrated into the village itself. They were, however, not allowed to remain long in undisputed possession of it. Our first counter-attack took place at 2.30 a.m. on the 15th and was only partly successful, the enemy still retaining possession of St. Eloi and some breastworks and trenches. By another effort made nearly two hours later we succeeded in driving him completely out of the village, and in recapturing all the trenches which had not been destroyed. The mound, however, still remained in the hands of the Germans, though it has been subjected to so heavy a fire that little use can be made of it.

The fighting in St. Eloi itself was, as is usual in such cases, of the fiercest description. On gaining the place the Germans had erected barricades across the streets defended by machine guns, and these had to be stormed one by one, our men coming on time after time regardless of their losses until the village had been cleared of the enemy. When morning dawned a search was carried out among the houses for the wounded, and on this occasion the Germans displayed a humanity which is, unfortunately, by no means always shown by them, for they refrained from firing on our bearer parties who were engaged in carrying away the wounded within quite close range.

During the day of the 15th they made a last effort to recover the ground by assault. Presumably it was not intended to be more than a forlorn hope, for not more than 200 men took part in it. Few can have escaped scot-

free, since a comparatively large number of bodies were afterwards counted in front of our trenches.

Prisoners captured during the fighting said that the German losses had been very great, the supports especially suffering severely from our shell fire, while our bombardment during the previous days had done much damage to their trenches.

The attack was carried out by infantry, followed closely by pioneers, whose mission it was to put the position in a state of defence as soon as the infantry had seized it.

Tuesday and Wednesday, the 16th and 17th, passed quietly except for heavy shelling at various points, especially in the neighbourhood of Neuve Chapelle. On the morning of the 17th some 200 Germans took advantage of the misty weather to try to reach their own trenches by advancing across the open near Le Touquet. They were seen, however, and fire was opened on them, causing many to fall.

In spite of the generally monotonous character of the present stage of the war, there have been some dramatic moments. One such moment immediately preceded the attack on Neuve Chapelle on the 18th, when our infantry, waiting to assault, were watching the bombardment. They could see our shells bursting in the thick veil of smoke and dust which hung over the German trenches, and as the minutes wore on, as our artillery fire grew hotter and hotter, and the time grew nearer for them to rush forward, their excitement rose to fever pitch. In some places they were seen to jump up on the parapets, brandishing their rifles towards the Germans and shouting remarks which were drowned in the roar of the guns. When the rush was actually made our losses were trifling. It was only in the subsequent advance that the heavy casualties occurred.

It is noteworthy that the enemy's wounded had to thank our men for many acts of kindness even in the excitement of the assault. In one case one of our soldiers, finding a wounded Prussian officer who had had his arm blown off by a shell, carried him to a place of safety under a heavy fire.

If the gallantry of regimental officers throughout the fighting it is unnecessary to speak. The casualty lists tell the tale. The heavy toll among them was largely due to the fact that in advancing over the intricate country intersected with hedges and ditches the platoon commanders had to go forward to reconnoitre the ground and discover the best way to circumvent or cross these obstacles without getting their men crowded together in narrow places such as gaps in hedgerows and bridges. This naturally entailed exposure. The success achieved and the extraordinary spirit shown by the troops are the best proofs of the qualities displayed by their leaders.

The accounts of much of the fighting that has taken place in the Western theatre of operations during the winter, dealing as they have with infinitesimal gains or losses of ground, naturally prompt the question, Of what advantage or disadvantage to either side can be advances and retirements which, in any other field campaign, would have been considered too trivial for record?

The answer is twofold. In the first place, a success, especially that of an offensive by which some definite point or position is gained, even though the advance registered be a small one, is as elevating to the *moral* of the attackers as it is depressing to that of the defenders, for it is the feeling of having beaten the enemy that counts, and not the extent of ground won. As has been stated already, the effect of the victory at Neuve Chapelle has in this way been remarkable. It has caused troops which were by no means depressed before to become elated, and has filled them with confidence in spite of undoubtedly heavy losses—a fact which the enemy may appreciate when next they meet.

The effect of the recent fighting on the Germans it is not possible to gauge. But, though they are stubborn folk, not easily downcast, the operations of the last few days cannot have been encouraging.

In the second place, in regard to the actual extent of ground won or lost, as has been frequently pointed out, the form of warfare into which the operations have developed approximates to that of a siege, in which very

much of the fighting is at close range and the possession of a yard of ground counts because it may enable the possessor to act against some other point with greater effect than he could otherwise have done.

It must also be borne in mind that the success of an action, especially at present, must be judged not only by its strategical or tactical results, but by the material damage done by killing or putting out of action large numbers of the enemy.

It is for this reason that the extent of the ground gained cannot be taken as a criterion of the result attained. One way in which quite a slight advance may be of far greater value to the side making it than would appear from the map is that it may, from its tactical situation, force the enemy, in order to recapture what is lost, to counter-attack under adverse conditions, which will cause him far greater losses than those suffered by the original attackers. To effect this object is perhaps more important than it has been in any previous campaign, for the struggle between the nations has now become one of exhaustion, and success will favour that side which can put out of action the greater number of its opponents.

The duty before the British Army in France now is to fight, and to kill, or "knock out," as many Germans as possible, as quickly as possible and with the least loss to itself. The duty before the British nation is, by every means in its power, to back up and help its soldiers to do this.

Just as there is no doubt that the outstanding lesson of this war, as of all wars, has been the value of preparation, there is also no doubt that the direction in which preparation has chiefly affected the operations has lain in the possession of guns and ammunition—two things which cannot be quickly improvised. Indeed, it can be said that nowadays Providence lies on the side of the "big batteries" more than on that of the "big battalions." This is partly due to the devastating effect of modern guns and to the mechanical traction which enables them and the ammunition for them to be brought into the field.

It has been proved again and again, and the fight at

Neuve Chapelle has only served to enforce the lesson, that the strongest entrenched positions can be carried with less loss to the attackers than to the defenders if the assault be sufficiently prepared by artillery, and, further, that under such conditions any counter-attack made by the defenders to regain what is lost is almost bound to fail, with immense loss to those attempting it. But to do this demands many guns and unlimited ammunition.

This war is a life-and-death struggle between entire nations, in which all the resources of every combatant are, or should be, mobilized to one end. Not only will victory depend, so far as material means are concerned, very largely on the action of artillery, or on the man behind the gun in the field. It will depend, equally, on the provision and maintenance of the artillery and its ammunition—in other words upon the action of manufacturer and the man in the workshop at home.

We are all fighting the same battle. For every failure to perform their share of the common task on the part of the industrial combatants the price will have to be paid by their comrades in the field—in blood; and the whole nation will suffer, even if it gain the victory in the long run. It may not be realized at home that, for the lack of means wherewith, from afar off, to blow into the air some trench or post bristling with machine-guns and barbed wire, friends, or at any rate countrymen, may be mown down in swathes.

March 21, 1915.

Some very illuminating letters have lately been found on prisoners captured at Neuve Chapelle and elsewhere, some of which bring into prominence the truly astonishing credulity of the German population.

MAGDEBURG [SAXONY],

February 28, 1915.

Several battalions of suffragettes have landed at Havre. There are 500 women in each battalion. I want to warn you to be very careful when you meet them. Don't let them scratch out your eyes, and, above all, don't let them capture

you. That would shame you before the whole world. England can only last a month without imports, so the blockade will, I hope, soon put an end to the war.

It is a fact that many of the prisoners recently taken have asked when the British Suffragette Corps would arrive at the front! Their idea of the power of the German submarine was evinced by the great anxiety they all expressed lest they should be sunk in crossing the Channel.

Another letter spoke of the sinking of a transport containing 2,000 English soldiers and of ships carrying food supplies. The writer added that, in view of these successes, he hoped Britain would starve before Germany did.

A great many correspondents describe the lack of the necessaries of life in Germany and express earnest desires for peace. One says that it must soon come, as Hindenburg has taken 50,000 Russian prisoners. Another expresses a hope that the Field-Marshal will put in an appearance on this front. The general impression gained from this mass of correspondence is that undoubted distress exists amongst the poorer classes, that great expectations are still entertained of early victory, but that the situation is creating some anxiety and, perhaps, even a little doubt in some quarters. It is significant, however, that even those who long most earnestly for peace do not appear to contemplate the possibility of purchasing it by the admission of defeat, which, to the vast majority, appears as remote and unthinkable as ever.

Whatever may be thought of the ideals and methods of the Germans, it is impossible not to admire the spirit which can induce a whole people to submit to be placed on rations representing a greatly reduced scale of living from that to which they are accustomed.

The following afford an insight into the economic situation:—

March 2, 1915.

Here in Radewisch things look very bad, almost as if we had the war in our own town. But only the poor feel it, things are not arranged as they should be: however, the

rich are getting the same amount of bread as the poor, 4 lb. a week, and often it does not look like bread. The rich buy the meat even if it costs three marks: they can buy it; they buy everything; but the poor cannot afford any more to buy at high prices.

REINS DORF [SAXONY], *February 15, 1915.*

I can only complain and complain again about the high price of meat and everything, and for a man who earns 12 marks a week it is very difficult to make ends meet.

February 17, 1915.

After next week we can no longer send large parcels by post—. Everything is becoming pretty expensive now; it should soon be time for the war to end. Bread costs 60pf. to 62pf. (6½d.) and only weighs 1,500 grammes (3¼ lbs.). Flour costs 30pf., and one can no longer go and buy the bread and flour one wants. You are given tickets, which you must take to the baker you are ordered to go to. The number of people who form the household is written on the tickets. Each person is allowed a total of 240 grm. of bread and 25 grm. of flour; one must do with that. One can get no more yeast; soap costs 50pf.; potatoes are becoming more expensive. I am anxious to see how this will continue, everything is becoming very expensive now.

On February 12 and 13 the Government collectors went from house to house and asked how much flour and what quantity of potatoes everybody had. They noted it all down so that the Government might estimate what was left. . . . Those who made false declarations were punished by six months' imprisonment or a fine of 1,500 marks (£75).

MUNSTER [WESTPHALIA], *February 17, 1915.*

Gradually we learn here that war means bread, there is scarcely any to be had in the whole town, just the same as with paraffin. Each grown-up person is allowed half a pound daily of " K " bread, cut in three slices, so that is not much.

KETSCH, *February 23, 1915.*

With us the situation is so bad that one can no longer buy potatoes or bread with one's money. A pound of flour already costs 30pf. I am allowed, with my child, a pound of

flour; we also have war bread. A pound of meat costs 1 mark 20, one can't buy any more of it. One is glad not to have six children when one finds trouble in feeding one.

LEIPZIG, *February 24, 1915.*

Last week they distributed bread tickets to each family. I receive 3 lb. of bread for 6d. and Else gets 2 lb. for 4d. This bread went like anything. My bread was all gone by Thursday, and I had no bread for Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, and they only gave me more on Tuesday. Potatoes which used to be 1d. went up to 3½d., and now they are 8d. It is a fearful increase. If only the war would stop. What will happen? They are always talking about the victories, but all the same the war does not stop. They might well make peace.

KARLSRUHE, *February 10, 1915.*

If only this terrible war would stop. It would please many people, for food is becoming more and more expensive, and we can only get 1 lb. of flour per week, and one small loaf of bread per day that costs 3d.

PFORZHEIM [BADEN], *February 4, 1915.*

I think we shall have to look forward to hard times. How can we live when work is made impossible and living is so dear? The factories will certainly close.

DITTELSTADT [SAXONY], *February 28, 1915.*

Everything is terribly dear here. Bread costs 20pf. a lb. One cannot get potatoes at all. Bread works out at 50pf. a day, so you can see how short we are. I am now out of work. I wish I could be with you, for without work and everything so dear things are terrible.

The following extracts from diaries throw some light on conditions in the war area:—

But I have never seen anything like the large town of Louvain. One part of the town was entirely destroyed, and there was not a single house standing complete. When we were before in Brussels we saw how cheeky the people were and wished us all dead. The children cry terribly for bread.

February 7, 1915.

I am billeted at Lille, Rue Gonnot 47. The house is in a fearful state. The Bavarian artillery passed through, looting and smashing everything.

February 19, 1915.

Fifteen kilometre march, which tired me. We are not as strong as at the beginning of the war. None of us could now do the march we did on the first day, we have been so weakened and strained by six months of war.

One man records that his last days in Messines were terrible; his unit had never before been subjected to such a fire. This, no doubt, refers to the bombardment by our heavy howitzers on March 2 and 7. Many other letters speak of the hard conditions of life in the trenches, but few of them are really pessimistic in tone, and some are distinctly the reverse. One prisoner, speaking of the effect of the Allies' artillery in recent engagements, said that if we had expended a similar amount of ammunition after the battle of the Marne, the war would have been over by now.

It is evident from letters that men of the Landsturm are now being passed from the depots into units in the front line. One letter from Saxony contains the following:—

It is terrible to see how old men of the untrained Landsturm are being commandeered to serve with arms.

March 23, 1915.

No events of any importance have occurred during the last few days. Thursday, March 18, passed quietly. On the 19th there was some artillery action in the neighbourhood of Armentières, which continued on the 20th. Our guns shelled Wez Macquart, a village south of the Lys, with effect, destroying observation stations and houses harbouring snipers. On Saturday and Sunday, the 20th and 21st, the enemy's aeroplanes displayed unusual enterprise and daring by dropping bombs on Estaires, St. Omer, and Lillers, little damage being done at any of these places, as has already been described in

the official *communiqué* of yesterday. On the 22nd our artillery in the centre were particularly successful, three direct hits being obtained on one hostile battery.

In their counter-attacks from the Bois du Biez during the fight round Neuve Chapelle the German losses were tremendous. Line after line went down before our rifles. Indeed, in their picturesque phraseology some of our Sepoys said that shooting the enemy was like cutting grain. Our men in action in this quarter were so excited that they clambered up on to the parapets in order to see better and obtain greater freedom to use their rifles.

In some of the captured trenches then held by us there was not room on the *banquettes*, or raised portions from which men fire, for all the men in the trench to shoot at the same time, and as the action proceeded those below in rear could not restrain their impatience. They shouted "Get down and give us a chance," some even pulling down those in front in order to take their places. One battalion reserved its fire until the Germans were only 50 yards away and then opened both with rapid rifle fire and with machine guns.

The German officers displayed the most reckless courage. On more than one occasion they invited certain death by riding forward on horseback to direct the attack to within a few hundred yards of our line. None of those who so exposed themselves escaped. One *Jäger* in charge of a machine gun kept his gun in action throughout our bombardment, and then, when our men charged down upon him, awaited death, calmly standing on the parapet of the trench and emptying his revolver at them.

The effective co-operation of our artillery was due in no small measure to the services of our airmen. In the misty weather that prevailed little could be seen by the latter from a height at which they were comparatively safe, and they did not hesitate to accept the greatest risks by descending to a height of only 800ft. above the hostile batteries. Our guns must have caused great losses both in the Bois du Biez and in rear of it, for an airman has since reported that the Germans have been burying numbers of their dead behind the wood.

The Indians are especially elated by the result of the action, and continually ask when they are going to have another fight. Many stories are told of their prowess. One Gurkha made his way into a house and single-handed captured five Germans, whom he marched off at the point of his kukri. It was curious to see them returning with articles of German equipment which they designated by the French word *souvenir*.

A brigade order has been captured which shows the measures undertaken by the Germans both to maintain discipline and to encourage the soldiers. Mention is made of a "War Newspaper," which is published in Lille and is supplied to the troops in the trenches.

We must do everything possible to prevent the men becoming dull and lethargic. I recommend that troops in rest billets should be given stirring history lessons, and, in particular, accounts of the present campaign. All officers must take an interest in cheering up their men and in drawing together the various classes. Encouragement of every sort prepares the way to victory.

Dissatisfaction is expressed at the lack of cleanliness and smartness, the laxity in saluting, and the prevalence of unbrushed hair and dirty hands.

Although stress has been laid on the German losses, our own heavy death-roll must not be overlooked. We have had to pay the price. In this connection, however, it is well to bear in mind certain facts. The progress made by us during the action at Neuve Chapelle was gained in the course of one attack. It was, therefore, an entirely different kind of operation from those undertaken in other quarters, consisting of a gradual advance lasting many weeks. Our casualties, great though they are, appear all the more severe in that they have been incurred in the course of a few days instead of being spread over a much longer period, although the net results would have been the same.

Our troops have shown in attack, as they have already shown in defence, that they can endure that highest test of all, great losses; and the cheerfulness of the survivors

and their readiness for another fight are proofs that their comrades have not died in vain. Those who have laid down their lives have done so in confidence that others as true as themselves will come forward to fill their places and will finish the work that they have begun.

March 26, 1915.

The lull on our front has continued during the last four days, though the enemy's artillery has been somewhat more active. On Monday, the 22nd, besides other results recorded in the last Summary, we succeeded in destroying one of the German anti-aircraft weapons which had been annoying our aviators. A machine gun was also knocked out and an ammunition store exploded. Neuve Chapelle has been heavily shelled from time to time, and on Tuesday, the 23rd, various points along the centre of our position were bombarded. Wednesday passed comparatively quietly.

The weather has become warmer, and in spite of some rain the country is drying fast.

Various accounts have been given of the action at Neuve Chapelle. A summary of the part played during the last six months by this place and a description of the general appearance of the battlefield as seen after the last engagement will, perhaps, do more than anything else to convey a true impression of the character of the fighting and of what led up to it.

Neuve Chapelle first came into prominence during our eastward advance to the north of La Bassée in October, 1914, when the Germans held it as one point in the series of rearguard positions they were taking up to delay our progress until their reinforcements should come up. On the 16th of that month the British first entered the village. Next day they drove the Germans still farther back and pressed on to Herlies. The neighbourhood of Le Pilly, some $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the east of Neuve Chapelle, reached on October 19, however, represents the high-water mark of our advance in this quarter, for by the 18th some of the enemy's reinforcements had come up and their resistance had developed into offence. Such was the weight which

they applied that by the 22nd our troops were withdrawn to a line passing east of Neuve Chapelle, which was still in our possession.

There was now continuous and fierce fighting in this quarter during the next few days, for the Germans were beginning that pressure along our front which preluded their great effort to break through to the sea on our left. On October 26 they drove back our troops on the east of the village and gained a portion of it, which they managed to retain in spite of our strenuous efforts to force them back. Being still more heavily reinforced, especially in artillery, they continued to push on, and by the morning of the 27th were masters of the whole of the village, our line being then to the west of it. As was reported at the time, the fighting here was of the most murderous nature, and the Germans were made to pay dearly for every step they gained. On October 28 we made a last attempt to win back this point, and by a desperate counter-attack some of our Indian troops carried the greater part of the village, only to be driven out by flanking fire down the streets. They could not maintain themselves; and on November 2 the Germans attacked our line to the west from Neuve Chapelle, which then was entirely in their hands, and drove us back a short distance, to the position in which we remained until March 10.

One interesting point in connection with the operations in this neighbourhood is that the troops we have recently forced out of Neuve Chapelle are of the German VIIIth (Westphalian) Army Corps, the same unit which drove our troops back four and a half months earlier.

The village which has now once again come into our possession was very much like any other in this part of Flanders, being an unimportant collection of houses and small farms scattered about a junction of country roads with a church in its centre. It was in reality quite a small place, but owing to the universal tendency of all these villages to straggle, each house being apparently built without any reference to its neighbours, it covered a considerable extent of ground. On the eastern side there

is, or rather was, a row of old cottages with a few modern houses among them. North-east of the village there is a small piece of ground, filled with enclosures and bounded on three sides by roads, known as "The Triangle," which figured prominently in the October fighting. On the western side there were some detached houses of a better class, surrounded by enclosures and orchards bounded by tall hedgerows. The ground all round is absolutely flat, and except in the open space which extends round the village, beyond the enclosures, view is restricted by the hedges and pollard trees.

The German trenches—held since November—ran some distance outside these enclosures, our own being situated at about 100 to 150 yards farther to the west.

Now, from the westward, all that can be seen of the place is a few ruined, crumbling red-brick houses, nearly all roofless, and in their midst a tall white shapeless mass, which represents the church. The ground between the main La Bassée road and the village is an expanse of pasture and heavy arable land seamed with trenches. The original configuration of the German first line is in many places hard to trace, for the ground has been so furrowed and pitted by shells that there remains nothing but confused mounds, which represent the former parapets, and hollows representing the trenches and dug-outs, in which may be seen calico sand-bags, articles of equipment, the remains of food, ammunition, *Pickelhauben* and *Jagers'* shakos. In many cases, also, the original trenches have been reversed by our attacking troops, who at once prepared them against counter-attack. In spots the ground appears to be powdered with a bright yellow fungus growth, and the stagnant water in the older shell craters is covered with a scum of the same hue. This is due to the lyddite from our high-explosive shell.

There is no doubt that in this neighbourhood the enemy's defences were inferior to ours in construction, in sanitation, and in the way they were drained. There is reason to believe, indeed, that in spite of very strict orders on the subject the senior officers neither personally supervised the execution of their front trenches nor

inspected them. Some of the officers' dug-outs were almost luxurious, being provided with beds and furniture taken from the neighbouring houses, oil lamps, and glass windows with muslin curtains. That the officers did not go in want of fresh milk was shown by the numerous carcasses of cows found both in the houses of Neuve Chapelle and near the trenches.

Once the German first line had been captured the enclosures and the village itself were stormed without much difficulty; it was only on the left and on the extreme right that the attack was temporarily held up. These enclosures near the village now present an extraordinary picture of the effect of modern shell fire. It must be remembered, however, that this is the accumulated result of the bombardments during October, occasional shells during four months, the concentrated bombardment by us during the 10th, and the fire of the German guns since then. For instance, in the orchard close to the church near the centre of the village the fruit trees are nearly all torn about, while one large oak four feet in diameter has been broken in half about a yard above the roots. The ground is strewn with branches and pitted with craters, the older ones being full of water, and the ditches which in this waterlogged country are dug all round the houses and enclosures have had their banks blown in. One result is that the water has overflowed into the various hollows of the ground, forming large pools and patches of bog.

The appearance of the village itself suggests the havoc wrought by an earthquake, for the place is one huge rubbish-heap; it is almost impossible to distinguish the streets amongst the rubble and bricks which have been hurled across and obliterated them. Here and there portions of houses are still standing, but these are few and far between and are dangerous to enter on account of falling tiles and tottering walls. In the churchyard the very dead have been uprooted, only to be buried again under masonry which has fallen from the church, and crosses from the heads of the tombs lie scattered in all directions. The sole thing in the cemetery that has

escaped damage is a wooden crucifix still erect amid the medley of overturned graves. There is another large crucifix still standing at the cross-roads at the north end of the village, and at the time our troops entered a dead German soldier was lying at its foot.

Looking eastwards from the village our front trenches are seen at a few hundred yards distance, while close beyond them, again, lies the German line. Away to the right is the Bois du Biez—a wood of the kind usual in this country, of saplings planted very close, interspersed with a few taller trees. It was in this that the Germans massed for their repeated counter-attacks during the four days' fighting, and it was all along its western edge that they lost most heavily. In front and to the left of our position the country is more open, and in this direction the scattered houses and farms along the roads, which were armed with machine guns, formed the centre of the enemy's resistance. They are now held by his snipers.

Away to the north-east rises a prominent landmark, the tall chimney of the Moulin du Pietre, still in German hands, though our line approaches it closely; and beyond this, about a mile and a half away, are the red roofs of Aubers, crowning the long ridge which dominates all the low ground to the east. North of the northernmost houses of Neuve Chapelle and a little to the west of the high road is a line of breastworks which the Germans held, and round which a terrible struggle raged on the morning of March 10. It was here that our men gallantly faced the enemy's machine guns again and again, but failed to force their way through the wire entanglements until another battalion, working round the flank of the Germans, drove them from their position and enabled us to make good the high road and to prosecute a further advance to the eastward.

Mention has been made of the number of machine guns placed in houses by the Germans; and from information received it is believed that they had as many as fifteen defending one section of their front some 250 yards long on the north of the village.

Collected together at different points behind our line are the graves of many of our men. In some places the dead have been buried where they fell, either singly or in little groups; in others there are regular cemeteries. All the graves have been carefully made, a wooden cross having been erected over each, with the name and regiment of the dead marked on it, and many have been turfed and have had flowers placed on them.

